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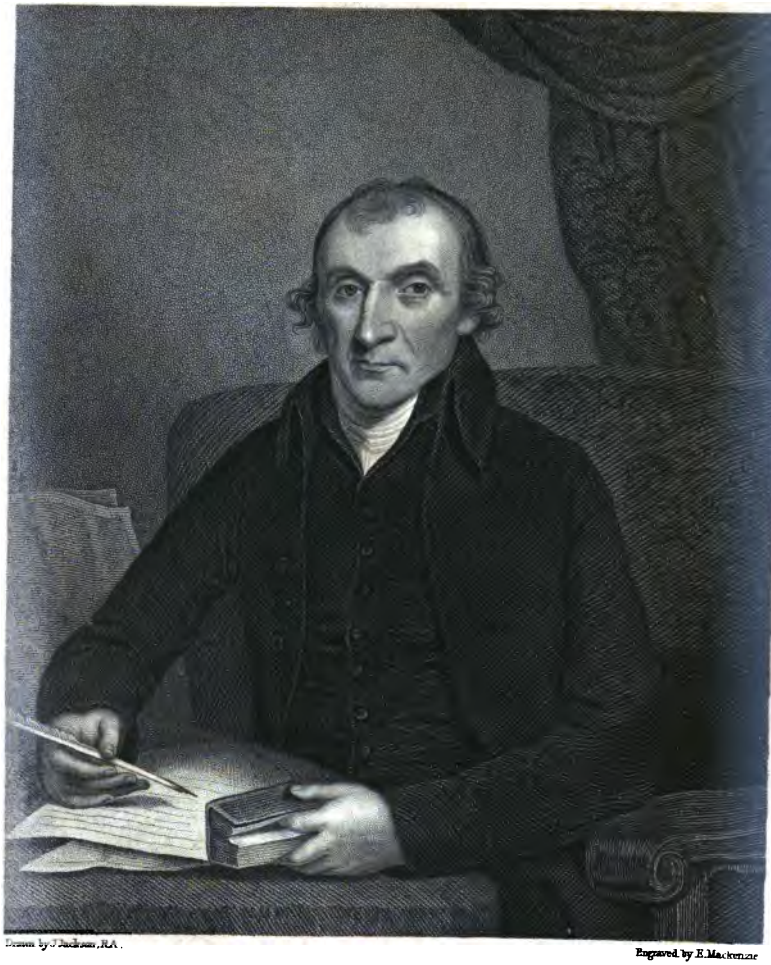

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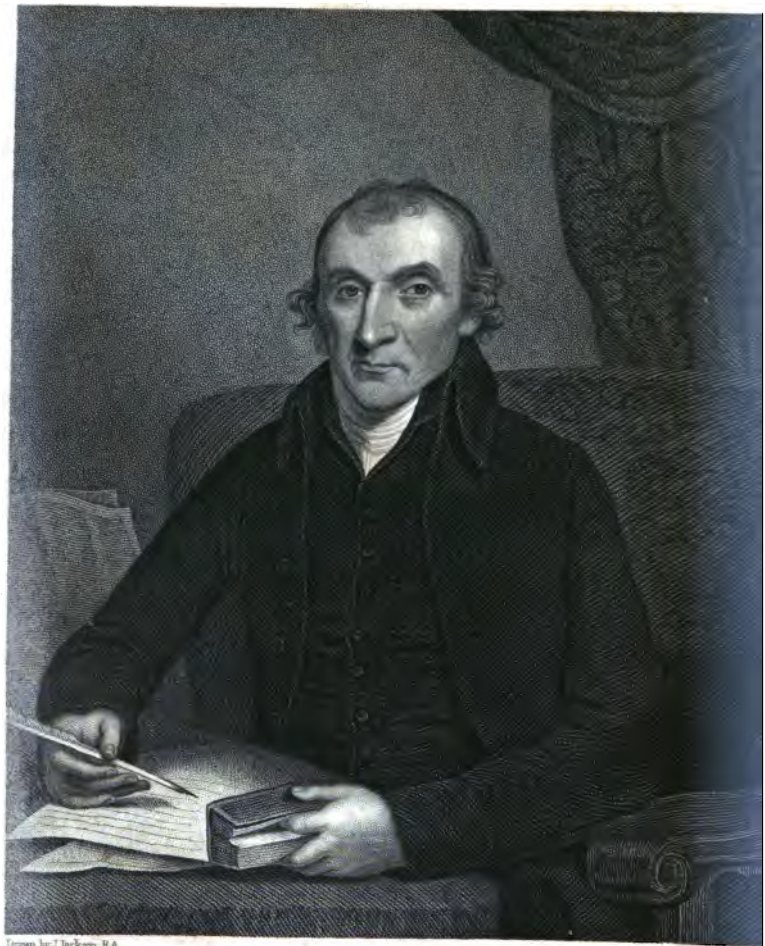

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REV. JOSEPH BENSON.

MEMOIRS

OF THE

REV. JOSEPH BENSON.

BY

RICHARD TREFFRY.

"They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever."—DANIEL.

New-York:
PUBLISHED BY CARLTON & PHILLIPS,
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PREFACE.

Soon after Mr. Benson's death, Memoirs of him were published by the Rev. James Macdonald; with whom, during the space of six years, he had lived in the closest habits of intimacy. But, whether from the size of the volume, or the price at which it was sold, or from any other cause, it is a fact, that though it has been on sale for eighteen years, a part of the edition yet remains unsold; and, consequently, by far the greater number of the present race of Methodists are utterly unacquainted with the character, virtues, and successes of that extraordinary man, who was, in his day, one of the brightest ornaments of Methodism; and to whom it is more deeply indebted than to almost any other man who has ever graced its triumphs since its revered founder finished his course, and passed into the skies. It was therefore thought that a moderate-sized duodecimo volume, descriptive of Mr. Benson's character, and illustrative of the labours of his life, would be generally acceptable, and greatly tend to promote the spi-

ritual profit of many. The author was requested to prepare such a memoir with as little delay as possible.

Such a volume is now presented to the public: and if the reader be benefited by perusing its contents, the end of its publication will be answered, and the glory be ascribed to God.

London, October 31st, 1840.

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MEMOIRS

OF THE

REV. JOSEPH BENSON.

CHAPTER I.

Introductory remarks—Mr. Benson's ancestry—His birth—Education—Conversion to God—He obtains the witness of the Spirit—Quits his father's house—Is disappointed in not meeting with Mr. Wesley at Newcastle—Arrives in London—Accompanies Mr. Wesley to Kingswood—Is appointed classical master of the school there—Engages in the prayer-meetings—Corresponds with Mr. Wesley—Keeps his terms at Edmund Hall, Oxford—Dedication of himself to God—His acquaintance with the Rev. John Fletcher.

THE instruction which God has been pleased to communicate to men in the Holy Scriptures for the formation of their moral characters, is given in the way both of precept and of example. The former describes the duty which they are imperatively required to perform; and the latter furnishes the encouragement which they have for doing it. Were the oracles of God composed solely of precepts, we might be induced to think that they exhibited a "test for human frailty too severe:" but when we contemplate men of like passions with ourselves, who have imbodied and exemplified the whole of Christianity in their experience and conduct, we not only see the practicability of the divine precepts, but we are encouraged and excited to become followers of them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises. If we abstract from revelation the names and actions of those illustrious men who

grace the pages of the divinely-inspired volume, the loss we should sustain would be incalculable. What a constellation of rare and brilliant lights would be extinguished! Actions the most renowned, deeds the most disinterested, incidents the most marvellous, providences the most singular, and enterprises the most perilous, would be consigned to oblivion, and all that laudable and holy emulation which the study of such records is calculated to inspire, would cease to exist. When we behold faith operating in Abraham, meekness in Moses, patience in Job, courage in Daniel, and benevolence in Paul, we are more powerfully affected by the exemplification of these virtues, as exhibited in living characters, than we could possibly be, by any abstract disquisitions on their nature or influence. Examples cannot fail to be influential. Minds possess the mysterious power of assimilation and imitability. And morals are not unfrequently the transcripts of what we see in others. Hence it behooves the living to remember the dead. "For us they sicken, and for us they die." And though dead, they yet speak to us; and thus the apostle exhorts the Hebrews, "Remember them which have the rule," or have had the rule, "over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." "This remembrance of the dead saints, with admiration of their virtues, and a desire to imitate them, is," says Dr. Macknight, "the only worship which is due to them from the living." There is no section of the Christian church in modern times which has given birth to more illustrious examples of distinguished excellence than that of the Wesleyan Methodists. Men, favoured with comparatively few advantages derived from education, and placed amidst many discouragements, have become burning and shining lights in their generation. Many of these luminaries have been quenched in death; the recollection of them is all that remains; but it is the province

of biography to transmit to posterity the record of their names, and their virtues, which will be in everlasting remembrance before God.

Among the early race of Methodist ministers, the name of JOSEPH BENSON holds a distinguished place. Of his remote ancestry little is now known. Miles Benson, his grandfather, was born about the year 1673, and died at Melmerby in Cumberland, September 6th, 1732. His wife Ann survived him thirty-five years; and died when she was nearly one hundred years old. They had three children, two sons and one daughter; one of the sons, whose name is unknown, died in his infancy. Sarah, the daughter, was married to a person of the name of Jonathan Watson, the father of Joseph Watson, by whose instrumentality Joseph Benson was brought to a knowledge of the truth. John Benson, his father, married Isabella Robinson, November 7th, 1731. By her he had three sons and four daughters; none of whom survived the parents, except Joseph and Ann; the latter of whom lived to an advanced age, and died either at Bishop-Aukland, or Durham; and her father, in the decline of life, having sold his paternal estate at Melmerby, came to reside with her. He was a man who possessed the form of godliness, but who remained destitute of its saving power, until a little before his death, when he found mercy of the Lord, and died in peace, November 7th, 1769. His wife was rigidly exact in her attention to moral and domestic duties. Even when a child, she loved reading and prayer; and when placed by Providence to superintend the affairs of a family, she looked well to the ways of her household. Her attendance on public worship in the establishment was serious and regular; and she was accustomed to call her family together after their return from church, that they might be instructed in the way of salvation, by reading the Holy Scriptures. She was a daughter of affliction,

having suffered much pain of body for thirty years, and many severe exercises from other quarters; but she bore all with the greatest patience and resignation, and especially her last sickness. The evidence of her acceptance with God through our Lord Jesus Christ was clear and satisfactory. In him alone she trusted for salvation; and just before her departure, she repeated three several times, "The God of Israel is my God, both now and for ever."

Mr. Joseph Benson was born January 25th, 1748, in the parish of Kirk-Oswald, in Cumberland; and baptized on the 21st of February in the same year. His parents evinced a peculiar degree of affection for him; and his father, either from the seriousness of his disposition, or the gravity of his demeanour, or the intensity of his application to learning, intended to train him up for the Christian ministry in the established Church. For the amusements to which children are accustomed, he had no relish; and he was rarely prevailed upon to associate with them in their sports and pastimes. He acquired the rudiments of learning in the village school; and he was subsequently placed under the care of Mr. Dean, a Presbyterian minister, who resided in the same parish. Of his tutor's talents as a teacher, and his aptitude for the communication of instruction, he entertained a high opinion; and in after-life, when his judgment was more matured, he was accustomed to speak of him in terms of unqualified commendation. Here he acquired some knowledge of the Latin and Greek languages; but, not satisfied with literary attainments, he embraced every opportunity that presented itself of reading books on theological subjects. The only books of a religious kind of which his father was possessed, besides the Bible, were the old "Whole Duty of Man," and an odd volume of inferior sermons; but availing himself of the indulgence afforded him by his tutor, who gave him access to his

library, he gladly read at his leisure some standard works on Christian theology. So intent was he on acquiring knowledge, that he scarcely suffered a moment to pass unimproved. Often in the severity of winter, while his mother and the female servants were employed in spinning, or in domestic duties, and the men-servants were enjoying themselves around the blazing fire, he retired to the remote part of the hall, to perfect himself in his lessons, and prepare for the engagements and duties of the ensuing day. And so little was he disposed to court his own ease, that, fearless of the winter's cold, he often voluntarily accompanied his father's men-servants, when they went with long poles in search of sheep buried in the snow. And to this endurance of cold and fatigue in early life may be attributed, under God, that vigour of constitution, and generally good health, which, with little intermission, he enjoyed until nearly the close of a long and laborious life.

But while he gave to his studies a laudable degree of attention, he was not unmindful of the welfare and salvation of his soul. The invisible realities of eternity often arrested his thoughts, and imbued his mind with a deep, death-like seriousness. By the inspiration of the Almighty he was gradually led to discover the evil of sin, the vanity of the world, and the necessity of holiness. Even when under ten years of age, he frequently retired into his closet, and sometimes into the fields, where on his bended knees he importuned Heaven with prayers, and sought that grace which would enable him to serve the Lord acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. Once, especially, his mind was unusually affected; and with many tears and much importunity, he pleaded the words of Jacob, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on,—then shall the Lord be my God." It does not appear, that at this time he had any acquaintance with the Methodists; or that he

frequented any place of worship, except the parish church. That he might not be a forgetful hearer of the word, he was in the habit of writing down all that he could recollect of the sermons which he heard; hoping thereby no less to strengthen his memory than to improve his mind. When he had arrived at a proper age, he was confirmed by the bishop, in conformity with the rites of the Establishment; and with the vows of God upon him, he deemed himself bound to be more strict and conscientious in the discharge of his religious duties than he had previously been. But though he was a sincere seeker of salvation, yet his views of its nature, and the mode of its attainment, were very defective and indistinct. With the doctrine of justification by faith he had no acquaintance. But where there is sincerity of mind, and a purpose of heart to do what is right, according to the information which we possess, superior light will be communicated, and clearer discoveries of the will of God be made known. "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way," Psalm xxv, 9. "If any man," saith Christ, "will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself," John vii, 17. He who commissioned Philip to go and lead the inquiring mind of the Ethiopian eunuch into the way of truth, provided an instructer for our young disciple. When he was about sixteen years of age, his cousin Joseph Watson, who had been providentially led to hear the gospel, by attending the ministry of the early Methodist preachers, was powerfully wrought upon by the divine Spirit; and being made deeply sensible of the desperate wickedness of his heart, and the sinfulness of his life, and knowing that unless he obtained mercy from God, he must suffer the punishment due to his offences, he was led to seek for redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of his sins. While he was in this state of penitence, sorrowing after a godly

sort, Joseph Benson happened to visit him; but how was he surprised, when his cousin, instead of accosting him familiarly, and amusing him with vain conversation, as he had been wont to do, began seriously to talk to him concerning his sin and danger, and the necessity of being converted from the error of his ways! He then invited him up stairs, and said, "Now kneel down!" When this was done, he, with intense desire, and great earnestness, poured out his heart before God on his behalf; and after engaging in prayer for some time, he said, "Now, Joseph, you must pray." At this suggestion, so peremptorily and unexpectedly urged upon him, he was agitated beyond description; but not daring to disobey, he began with a palpitating heart, and a tremulous voice, to sue for mercy at the throne of grace. How long these two relations, and sincere penitents, continued to engage in this hallowed exercise, cannot now be known; but the impressions made on the mind of the subject of this memoir were too deep and indelible to be easily effaced.

A few weeks after this, in company with his sister, he paid his cousin another visit, whom he found engaged in reading the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans; and after reading aloud, with much animation, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," he said, "Joseph, do you feel this? Do you know there is no condemnation to you?" These pointed questions, with several others of a similar nature that were proposed to him, excited his attention, and led to serious self-examination; and on returning home with his sister, he could not refrain from entering into conversation with her, on the wondrous change which had taken place on the mind of his cousin, the effects of which were depicted on his very countenance. From that time Mr. Benson began to seek the Lord with all his heart; he also attended the ministry of the Methodists; and by the advice of his

cousin united himself to the society, and diligently read such of Mr. Wesley's sermons, and other works, as he could procure. His own words will best describe the state of his mind at this time. "I was," says he, "more and more deeply made sensible of my alienation from God, by continuing to hear the Methodists, with whom I was united, and was in great disquietude and distress almost continually for about ten months; till the Lord gave me to believe in his Son, and shed abroad his love in my heart. I may observe, I was not without some gracious drawings from God, and transient tastes of his goodness at times, during that distress; but for about seven or eight weeks before it was given me to believe, I was powerfully tempted to despair of ever obtaining mercy. Satan thrust sore at me, and I was in horrid agony: when I kneeled down to pray, I could not pray; it seemed as though the heavens were brass, and not to be pierced. My tears, I saw, availed nothing. I was sorely impatient, and ready to give up all for lost. But glory be to God, he turned my heaviness into joy, and made light to spring up in my heart." The length of time which the subject of this memoir continued seeking the Lord before he obtained the witness of the Spirit to his adoption, can only be attributed to the weakness of his faith, or to some erroneous opinions which he entertained concerning a sinner's justification before God. Penitent sinners who are earnestly seeking the pardon of their sins, are too frequently accustomed to think that some considerable space of time must elapse, before they are entitled to expect the blessing which they so ardently desire. But where there is a consciousness of guilt, attended with a dread of future punishment,—where the soul is brought to groan under the burden of sin,—where there is an intense fervency of spirit awakened after God, combined with a full belief in the infinite efficacy of the blood of atonement,—there, the mind is fully fitted

for the salvation of the gospel. Nor can any delay in our expectations, any mortification of our corruptions, any austerities practised upon our bodies, make us more worthy of the promise of that Spirit, which they that believe on him shall receive. Salvation is of the Lord; but though it is by grace, yet it is through faith; and faith is an act of recumbency on the part of man,—a resting on the divine promise, and a full confidence that what God hath promised he is able and willing this moment to perform. He therefore that looks at the promise, clings to it, claims it as his own, and depends implicitly on Him who is mighty to save, takes hold of his strength, and receives the full benefit of his meritorious sacrifice.

> "Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
> And looks to that alone;
> Laughs at impossibilities,
> And cries, It shall be done."

Mr. Benson pursued his studies under the tuition of Mr. Dean, until he arrived at the age of seventeen: he then engaged himself as a teacher in a school at Gamblesby, in Cumberland, where he continued one year only. His situation at this time was far from being comfortable. His father disapproved of the step that he had taken in joining the Methodist society: in the country where he lived, Methodism was little known, and less respected. He had also to encounter considerable opposition; and he enjoyed but few opportunities of sitting under the ministry of the word. Thus circumstanced, he meditated the design of leaving his native place and neighbourhood, and of occupying some situation where he might have more frequent opportunities of attending the means of grace, and of cultivating a more intimate acquaintance with that body of Christians to whom he had voluntarily united himself. With a few of the preachers only he was partially acquainted; Mr. Wesley he had never seen: hearing, however, that

he was at Newcastle, and having a great desire to see a man of whom he had heard so much, he, in December, 1765, set off for the above place. His father accompanied him some miles on the road; and at Alstone-Moor they "parted from each other, with floods of tears." They could scarcely have been more deeply affected, had they foreseen, as the sequel proved, that they were never to meet more in this world. Before the son again visited his native place, the father had gone the way of all flesh.

What the subject of this memoir felt, in thus tearing himself away from all the tender connections of life, can be conceived only by those who have been placed in similar circumstances. No motive, less influential than faith in God's guiding providence, combined with a sense of duty, could have prompted him, like the ancient patriarch, to go out, scarcely knowing whither he went. The world was all before him. He had quitted his kindred, and his father's house, to go among strangers, not knowing what encouragement he would meet with, or where his lot would be cast. On his arrival at Newcastle, where he expected to meet Mr. Wesley, he was disappointed and grieved to find that he had some time previously left that place. Determined, however, not to yield to discouragement, he purposed to go by sea to London; but as the vessel in which he intended to embark did not sail as soon as he expected, he set off on foot, in the depth of winter, for the metropolis. He proceeded as far as Ferrybridge, where he met with a gentleman who kindly commiserated his circumstances, and generously paid his coach-fare to town. Here he remained for several weeks, at the expiration of which he went to Bristol;* most probably in company with Mr. Wesley, who arrived there on Tuesday, March 11th, 1766,

* There are no documents of which I am possessed that render it certain that Mr. Benson actually accompanied Mr. Wesley to Bristol: but as I learn from the Journal of the latter, that he arrived in Bristol

when he appointed Mr. Benson to the office of classical master of Kingswood school. This school occupied a large share of Mr. Wesley's attention and solicitude: it was now composed of the sons of the itinerant preachers; and a few of the more opulent members of the Methodist societies had sent their sons to this seminary to receive a Christian education. But the state of the school gave Mr. Wesley much uneasiness. The nature of the evils that had crept in, or of the disorders that prevailed in the school, we have no means, at this distant period, of ascertaining. Mr. Wesley says, "Wednesday, 12th, I rode over to Kingswood; and having told my whole mind to the masters and servants, spoke to the children in a far stronger manner than ever I did before. I will kill or cure; I will have one or the other,—a Christian school, or none at all." And it is satisfactory to learn, that during Mr. Benson's continuance there, the most visible and acknowledged improvements took place in the school. This is evident from Mr. Wesley's own statement. "Tuesday, March 8th, 1768," he says, "I reached Bristol, where I did not find any decay in the work of God, though it did not go on so vigorously as at Kingswood. Here the meetings for prayer had been exceedingly blessed; some were convinced or converted almost daily; and near seventy new members had been added to the society in about three months' time. The school, likewise, is in a flourishing condition. Several of the children continue serious; and all of them are in better order than they have been for some years." And on Friday, October 7th, in the same year, Mr. Wesley visited the school again; on which occasion he says, "I spent an hour, much to my satisfaction, with the children at Kingswood. There is reason to hope

that day, and the following day went to Kingswood; and from the statement of the former, that he was appointed to his office at that time, I infer that they went to Bristol together.

that the grace of God is still working among them. Some are still alive to God; and all behave in such a manner, that I have seen no other school-boys like them." And it is reasonable to infer, that this improvement in the school was principally to be attributed to Mr. Benson's judicious superintendence of it; for while he was solicitous to promote its literary character, he was no less concerned to make the children Christians than scholars. Nor was his labour in vain; for he had the happiness of seeing several of them seriously concerned for the salvation of their souls. And in this visitation he acknowledged the divine hand, and said, "O Lord, the work is thine; to thee be all the glory."

The state of Mr. Benson's mind, at this time, will be best understood by a reference to his own words. "Nov. 8th, 1767," he says, "I am convinced that temporal things are comparatively nothing; that eternal things are all; and that, consequently, my chief business is to secure the salvation of my own soul. I believe, one great cause of my having lived so little to God, has been, that my excessive application to study has prevented me from duly attending to private devotion. I have studied, I doubt not, with an intent to glorify God, by being more useful to others; but my own soul demands my greatest attention: and indeed I see, that to be useful to others, I must myself live near to God. I betake myself, therefore, to thee, O my gracious God and Saviour, and would renew my covenant with thee. And that I may no longer be unfruitful, I rely upon thee for grace, to regulate my conduct according to the resolutions I now form. But these, O my God, like all my former resolutions, will be broken, unless thou renew my soul in righteousness, and enable me to be watchful." The following are some of the resolutions which were then formed as rules for his future conduct:—"To rise at four o'clock in the morning, and to go to bed

at nine at night. Never to trifle away time in vain conversation, useless visits, or studying any thing which would not be to my advantage.—To be careful to maintain private prayer, and not to be content without communion with God in it. To spend from four to five o'clock every morning, and from five to six every evening, in devout meditation and prayer; and at nine in the morning and at three in the evening to devote a few minutes to prayer. Let me with a single eye, not for praise, instruct the boys diligently in useful learning, and see that they make as great a progress as possible. Let me, especially, endeavour, depending upon divine influence, to impress a sense of the things of God upon their minds, at the same time that they are instructed in the principles of religion."

Mr. Benson at this time had not begun to preach, nor is there any reason to believe that he ever indulged in the expectation of being called to the honourable and responsible office of the Christian ministry. On the contrary, he thought himself so slow of speech, as to be utterly incapable of holding an extemporaneous discourse; and he felt a strong disinclination to take any prominent part in the public worship of the sanctuary. But it is the province of God to bring the blind by a way that they know not; and while he calls and qualifies men to preach his gospel, he opens doors of usefulness for them, and points out the providential path in which he would have them to walk. The Kingswood population was then, and had been from time immemorial, degraded and demoralized beyond description: it is impossible to enumerate any vicious, brutal, or mischievous practices to which the inhabitants were not generally addicted. Shame was there no longer the concomitant of sin, but vice walked forth in all its hideous but unblushing deformity. "Few persons," said Mr. Wesley, "have lived long in the west of England, who have not heard of the colliers of Kingswood, a people famous for

neither fearing God nor regarding man; so ignorant of the things of God, that they seemed but one remove from the beasts that perish; and therefore utterly without desire of instruction, as well as without the means of it." It must be acknowledged, that for several years before Mr. Benson took up his residence at Kingswood, some considerable improvements had taken place in the moral condition of the inhabitants: a congregation had been gathered, a chapel erected, a society formed, and some notoriously profligate characters had been converted from the error of their ways; but still the means of instruction were totally inadequate to meet the moral exigence of the population. Schools there were none; the attendance of the itinerant preachers was very irregular; and hence, Mr. Benson was persuaded to engage occasionally in the prayer-meetings, and, subsequently, to supply the places of the preachers, when disappointments occurred; and thus unawares, and without any previously-formed plan, he was led, much against his inclination, to become a regular preacher of the everlasting gospel. It must be conceded that God frequently communicates a knowledge of his will to the minds of those whom he designs to employ in the work of the ministry. They are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to preach the gospel; and they know that their own salvation will be endangered if they prove disobedient to the heavenly calling. But there are cases in which a conviction of duty is not so clear as to amount to certainty, and the impression on the mind is not so vivid as to exclude doubt. They are not always the most favoured ministers of the word who are the most forward to engage in the ministerial work. There may be great confidence, where there is but little qualification. Few men in modern times have been more honoured of God, or more successful in winning souls to Christ, than Mr. Benson; and yet few men have entered on the work of the ministry with more

reluctance, or felt less confident of their ability for the right discharge of it, than he did.

Soon after Mr. Benson's establishment at Kingswood, he commenced a correspondence with Mr. Wesley. The following passages are extracts from two of Mr. Wesley's letters to him; the one dated November 7th, 1768, and the other December 4th, in the same year:—

"DEAR JOSEPH,—You have now twenty more volumes of the 'Philosophical Transactions.' Dr. Burton's Latin and Greek Poems you have in the study. Malebranche, and some other books, are coming. Logic you cannot crack without a tutor: I must read it to Peter and you, if we live to meet. It would not be amiss if I had a catalogue of the books at Kingswood; then I should know the better what to buy. As fast as I can meet with them at sales, I shall procure what are yet wanting. But beware you be not swallowed up in books: an ounce of love is worth a pound of knowledge. I cannot yet convince you of one thing, (and it is a thing of importance,) that you may make greater progress in valuable knowledge, by reading those books, (particularly if read in that order,) than you can by reading any other books which are now extant in England. It follows, that your friend B., in this respect, is not your friend. For he puts you out of your way; he retards you in the attainment of the most useful knowledge. He gratifies your curiosity, (a bad principle too,) at the expense of your improvement. It is better for you to read these books than his; which (if they are not hurtful or dangerous, at least) do not lead directly to the end you propose. Choose the best way."

From these extracts it appears, that Mr. Benson was accustomed to consult Mr. Wesley in reference to the books which he should study; and under date of July 25th,

1769, he wrote out a list of classic works, and of many of the most approved books that have appeared in the English language on a variety of subjects, on which he was in the habit of making observations as he perused them. About this time he finished the reading of Locke's Treatise of the Human Understanding, Butler's Analogy, the ancient part of the Universal History, Euclid's Elements; and he had begun the perusal of Newton's Principia. From this it is evident, that he not only availed himself of every opportunity of acquainting himself with such books as more immediately related to his office as classical tutor, but that, under the influence of that intense thirst for knowledge, peculiar to men of comprehensive and inquiring minds, he was led to study works of general science, and thus to intermeddle with all wisdom. A few months previously to this, he had entered his name in the books of the University of Oxford, and "believed that his doing so was in conformity with the divine will." He had written to Mr. Wesley on the subject, and the following letter is his answer:—

"*Cork, May 27th*, 1769.

"DEAR JOSEPH,—You have now (what you never had before) a clear providential call to Oxford. If you keep a single eye, and have courage and steadiness, you may be an instrument of much good. But you will tread on slippery ground; and the serious persons you mention may do you more hurt than many others. When I was at Oxford, I never was afraid of any but the almost Christians. If you give way to them and their prudence, a hair's breadth, you will be removed from the hope of the gospel. If you are not moved, if you tread in the same steps which my brother and I did, you may be a means, under God, of raising another set of real Bible Christians. How long the world will suffer them, (whether longer than they did us or not,) is in God's hand."

From that time, Mr. Benson regularly kept his terms at St. Edmund Hall; and was, according to the testimony of a clergyman of the Church of England, who was his contemporary and friend at that seat of learning, "conscientiously attentive to the studies and obligations of his situation." By diligent study, he acquainted himself more fully with the classics and with metaphysics; and he attended ectures on all the branches of natural philosophy, and cultivated every part of a university education. But while he pursued his classical and mathematical studies with unwearied assiduity, he was not unmindful of his own personal salvation. To maintain the life of God in his own soul, was his first concern; and nothing gave him such exquisite pain of mind, as that deep sense, under which he laboured, of his own imperfections. He read with great attention Dr. Doddridge's description of the Christian temper; and, to use his own words, he complained that "he came short of it in many respects." He then says, "O my God, I am not a shining image of my Redeemer. Humble me, that after so long a profession I have brought forth so little fruit. I am indeed ashamed before thee; I claim pardon through Jesus; and glory for ever be ascribed to thee, thou dost pardon and give me access to thyself." He then set apart a day for the express purpose of dedicating himself to God. The following is the form of words which he used on the occasion:—

"Eternal and ever-blessed God! I desire to present myself before thee with the deepest humiliation and abasement of soul, sensible how unworthy such a sinful worm is to appear before the holy Majesty of heaven, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords; and especially on such an occasion as this, even to enter into a covenant transaction with thee. But the scheme and plan are thine. Thy infinite condescension hath offered it by thy Son, and thy grace hath inclined my heart to accept of it.

"I come, therefore, acknowledging myself to have been a great offender; smiting on my breast, and saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' I come, invited by thy Son, and wholly trust in his merits for acceptance; entreating that, for his sake, thou wilt be merciful to my unrighteousness, and wilt no more remember my sins. Receive, I beseech thee, thy revolted creature, who is convinced of thy right to him, and desires nothing so much as that he may be wholly thine!

"This day I do, with all solemnity, again surrender myself to thee, as thy grace hath often inclined me to do in times past, though my rebellious heart hath frequently turned aside from following thee, and wandered after vanity. I would now again renounce all former lords that have had dominion over me, and consecrate to thee all I have and all that I am: the faculties of my mind, and all the knowledge thou hast enabled me to attain by the use of those faculties; the members of my body, my worldly income and possessions of whatever kind, my time, and my influence over others; to be all used entirely to thy glory, and resolutely employed in obedience to thy commands, as long as thou continuest me in life: with an ardent and humble resolution to continue thine, through all the endless ages of eternity.

"To thy direction, also, I resign myself, and all I am and have, to be disposed of by thee in such a manner, as thou shalt in infinite wisdom judge most subservient to thy glory. To thee I leave the management of all events; and say, without reserve, 'Not my will, but thine be done.'

"While I live, may I live only to be used as an instrument to promote thy glory. O let me be employed in thy service! Lord, make me useful; and keep me continually sensible that my usefulness depends entirely upon thyself. Convinced of my own weakness and insufficiency for the work that thou hast called me to, I would look to thee for

a supply of every deficiency; for gifts and grace, that I may in my present capacity be useful to thy servants over whom thou hast placed me, and so to thy church and people. For this purpose, by long experience, I find I am insufficient of myself, and also in any measure to do thy will without thy continued assistance; and therefore humbly declare, I rely and trust therein, beseeching thee to wash me in the blood of my Saviour, sanctify me by his Spirit, transform me more and more into his image, and let my life be spent under the influence of his grace, and in the light of thy countenance as my Father and my God.

"Number me among thy peculiar people; and when the solemn hour of death comes, may I remember this thy covenant, well ordered in all things and sure, as my salvation and all my desire, though every hope and enjoyment is perishing. And do thou, O Lord, remember it too. Look down with pity, O my heavenly Father, on thy languishing and dying child! Embrace me in thy everlasting arms. Put strength and confidence into my departing spirit, and receive, at the abodes of them that sleep in Jesus, peacefully and joyfully to wait the accomplishment of thy great promise to all thy people, even that of a glorious resurrection, and of eternal happiness in thy heavenly presence. And if any surviving friend should, when I am in the dust, meet with this memorial of my solemn transactions with thee, may he make the engagements his own! And do thou graciously admit him to partake of all the blessings of thy covenant through the great Mediator of it; to whom, with thee, O Father, and thy Holy Spirit, be everlasting praises ascribed by all the millions who are thus saved by thee, and all those other celestial spirits in whose work and blessedness thou hast called them to share! Amen. JOSEPH BENSON."

During his residence at Kingswood, he was favoured with an opportunity of forming an acquaintance with Mr. Fletcher. "As he occasionally," says Mr. Benson, "made an excursion from Madeley to Bristol and Bath, in one of those excursions we invited him to preach at Kingswood. He was peculiarly assisted while he was applying those encouraging words, 'Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.' The people were exceedingly affected; indeed quite melted down. The tears streamed so fast from the eyes of the poor colliers, that their black faces were washed by them, and almost universally streaked with white. And as to himself, his zealous soul had been carried out so far beyond his strength, that when he concluded, he put off a shirt which was as wet as if it had been dipped in water. But this was nothing strange: wherever he preached, it was generally the case. From this time I conceived a particular esteem for him, chiefly on account of his piety; and wished much for a further acquaintance with him,—a blessing which I soon after obtained."

CHAPTER II.

The college at Trevecca in Wales—Terms on which the students were admitted—Mr. Fletcher appointed to superintend the establishment—Mr. Benson chosen head-master—His dismissal from the college—His removal to Oxford—Is refused ordination—Leaves Oxford—Visits his friends at Bristol—Preaches in different parts of Wiltshire.

About the year 1767, the countess of Huntingdon founded a college at Trevecca, for the education of candidates for the Christian ministry. For several years previously, her ladyship had been engaged in purchasing, hiring, or building chapels in different parts of the kingdom, for the performance of divine worship. These chapels had

been almost uniformly supplied by clergymen, who were episcopally ordained, and who conducted the worship according to the usages of the established Church. But in proportion as new doors of usefulness were opened, and supplies for additional places urgently required, a sufficient number of clergymen could not be procured to meet the growing demand. And this suggested to the mind of the countess the idea of founding a college for training up young men for the ministry. It was agreed to admit such candidates only as gave evidence of a work of grace in their hearts; and who were resolved to dedicate themselves entirely to the work of the Lord. They were allowed to remain in the college for three years; to have their education, with all the necessaries of life, gratis; and to be presented annually with a new suit of clothes for each student; and at the expiration of the allotted term, they were to be at full liberty to get episcopal ordination, and to go into the Church, or to exercise their ministry among Protestant dissenters. The erection of this seminary met with the concurrence and sanction of the most eminent evangelical ministers of that day. It was opened August 24th, 1768; and the countess of Huntingdon had invited Mr. Fletcher, whom she had known for some years, and of whose piety, learning, and abilities she had formed a most exalted opinion, to take the superintendence of it. With this invitation Mr. Fletcher most willingly complied; and though the duties of his parish prevented him from making Trevecca his constant residence, yet he agreed to spend as much time there as his circumstances allowed. The office which he was called to fill required him to direct the appointment of masters, the admission or exclusion of students, and to watch over the general, and especially the spiritual, interest of the establishment. And this he consented to do, without fee or reward; influenced by the sole motive of benefiting these young men, who

were candidates for the glorious office of preaching the gospel.

In the course of a few months after the opening of the college, on the recommendation of Mr. Fletcher, and with the sanction of Mr. Wesley, Mr. Benson was chosen by the countess to be head-master of the establishment. For some time after his appointment to this office, he was unable to leave Kingswood, for want of a person to fill his situation there; yet in the spring of the year 1770 he quitted that place, and went to reside at Trevecca; and for some time he was well satisfied with the office which he was appointed to fill. The young men were serious, they made considerable progress in learning, and many of them seemed to have talents for the ministry. Mr. Fletcher visited them frequently; and was received as an angel of God. It is impossible to describe the veneration in which they all held him. Like Elijah in the schools of the prophets, he was revered; he was loved; he was almost adored; and that not only by the students, but by every member of the family. His full heart would not suffer him to be silent. He *must* speak; and the students were more ready to hearken to this servant of Christ, than to attend to Sallust, Virgil, Cicero, or any Latin or Greek historian, poet, or philosopher which they had been engaged in reading. And they seldom hearkened long before they were all in tears, and every heart caught fire from the flame which burned in his soul.

But it is to be lamented that this happy and prosperous state of the college was but of brief duration. It could scarcely, indeed, be expected, that no attempts would be made to interrupt the harmony, and destroy the union, that reigned among the students. Offences will come, dissensions and divisions will arise, even in the best-organized societies; and though the institution at Trevecca was commenced under such favourable circumstances, and

placed under the superintendence and direction of such exemplary and well-qualified men, yet, in the course of two years, roots of bitterness had sprung up and troubled them; and thereby many had been defiled. The cause of this requires a few words of explanation.

In August, 1770, the twenty-seventh Methodist conference was held in London. To repel the encroachments of Antinomianism, and convey correct sentiments of evangelical truth, certain propositions were agreed to, and published, which must be familiar to most of our readers. "Lady Huntingdon, and several other zealous persons," like-minded with herself, "apprehending that the fundamental truths of the gospel were struck at in these Minutes of conference, and considering Mr. Wesley's consequence in the religious world, as standing at the head of such numerous societies, thought it incumbent upon them to show their abhorrence of the doctrines which he espoused and taught; doctrines which they believed subverted the whole fabric of the Christian faith. Mr. Shirley publicly said, that he 'deemed peace in such a case a shameful indolence, and silence no less than treachery.' And Lady Huntingdon, resolved that no imputation of tacitly assenting to such doctrines should lie on her name, declared, that whoever did not wholly disavow them, should quit her college. That Mr. Benson was suspected of holding these anti-Calvinistic doctrines is more than probable. He had previously published a pamphlet on the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, in which he declared his belief in the infinite efficiency of the eternal Spirit to eradicate the principle of innate depravity, and cleanse the soul from the last remains of sin in this life. This doctrine was then deemed by Mr. Shirley and Lady Huntingdon erroneous and anti-Scriptural; and now, having committed an additional offence, in vindicating Mr. Wesley, and defending the doctrine of the Minutes of the conference, he was unceremoniously dis-

involved him in the most disagreeable circumstances, must be readily admitted. The students were chiefly Calvinistic in their creed; and the peculiarities of that creed were made so prominent in their discourses, that even their best friends were disgusted with them. As a proof of it, Mr. Wesley says in his Journal: "Friday, August 14th, 1772. About noon, at the request of my old friend Howel Harris, I preached at Trevecca on 'the strait gate;' and we found our hearts knit together as at the beginning. He said, 'I have borne with those pert, ignorant young men, vulgarly called students, till I cannot in conscience bear any longer. They preach barefaced reprobation, and so broad Antinomianism, that I have been constrained to oppose them to the face, even in the public congregation.'" Mr. Wesley adds, "It is no wonder that they should preach thus. What better can be expected from raw lads of little understanding, little learning, and no experience?" Thus circumstanced, had Mr. Benson continued to reside at Trevecca, he would have had to occupy the same pulpit and preach to the same congregation as his pupils; and by coming in collision with each other, the college would have been a house divided against itself; and thus, disputations and controversies would have ensued, productive of the most unpleasant effects, and ruinous to the peace and harmony of the establishment. And though the expulsion of Mr. Benson from the college must have been inexpressibly painful to his own mind, yet it tended to bind him more closely to the doctrines of Methodism; and ultimately led to his becoming an itinerant preacher in the Wesleyan connection. But he had long before that fixed his mind on going into the Church; his father had designed him to be a Church minister; and from early life he had a strong predilection toward the Establishment; and now, being dismissed from Trevecca, he went to Oxford, with a design of graduating in the usual manner: but here new

difficulties met him, and insurmountable obstacles were thrown in his way. The following are his own words:—"I entered at Oxford, in hopes of perfecting my education in the languages and sciences. And as this was soon after the doctors and masters in full convocation, a general search being made, had expelled from the university, not only all that prayed extempore, or read and expounded the Scriptures to the poor and ignorant in private houses in town or country; but, also, all that were judged deficient in capacity or learning; had I not reason to expect I was become a member of a very learned, as well as pure, body? But how great was my astonishment and mortification, when, waiting upon my tutor, Mr. B——, to know in what books he would give me lectures, I was given to understand that the books which the gentlemen under his care read, (some of whom were in orders,) were Cornelius Nepos, and the Greek Testament, and that I must go through these books with them. After attending a few times at the hours appointed, unable any longer to brook so much loss of time, I made bold to intimate that these books, and most of the Latin and Greek classics, were very familiar to me, as I had taught them all for some years at a grammar school near Bristol. He then informed me, that he would excuse my attending, but, as none of the other gentlemen under his care were capable of reading any other books, he could not conveniently give me lectures in any other. I was therefore obliged, though at the univer sity, to be, what you call, self-taught; for I did not receive the smallest assistance from any, save that I attended, for a few times, public lectures on divinity, read by the regius professor, at Christ Church, and went through a course of lectures on experimental philosophy."

But this disappointment was but a prelude to one more severely painful, to which he was subsequently obliged to submit. In conversation with his tutor, he was induced to

relate, in the most frank and undisguised manner, some portions of his history; especially his connection with Mr. Wesley and with Lady Huntingdon, and the religious exercises in which he was called to engage in consequence of that connection. In doing this, he had not the slightest suspicion, that these things would operate to his disadvantage; that the prejudice of his tutor would be excited, or that the door of his admission into the Church would be thereby effectually shut against him: but so it proved; for the tutor peremptorily refused to sign his testimonials for orders, and even declined to consider him any longer in the character of a pupil.

In this business Mr. Benson considered himself unjustly and cruelly treated. He acknowledged that he had occasionally, when in the country, exhorted and prayed with a company of people assembled for the purpose of devotion in the neighbourhood; but this was always at an hour which did not interfere with the church service. It could have no tendency, therefore, to draw people from the church; especially as they were advised constantly to attend it, which they in general did. Neither could it be justly construed as an endeavour to instil into them particular notions, or opinions of small importance; for the exhortations were only calculated to promote true religion; to persuade to a conduct and temper manifestly good and praiseworthy; and to dissuade from practices confessedly wicked and unbecoming. These exhortations he declares he thought it his duty to give; and he did not conceive that he had violated any law, civil or ecclesiastical. And to be deprived of a university education, and hindered from entering the ministry in a regular manner, for doing what he judged his duty, he thought a very hard case.

And even assuming that his conduct had been illegal, yet, as he did not apprehend it such, but acted from a conviction of duty, the worst that can be said of it is, that it

was mistaken conduct: and he complains of it as unreasonable and unjust, that it should meet with a punishment, seldom, if ever, inflicted upon the perpetrators of the most flagrant acts of impiety and immorality; especially when it is considered, that he had never been warned or admonished to abstain from such exercises, nor had any liberty afforded to evince a change of conduct. And having spent two years at the university, it must have been attended with considerable expense, as well as loss of time, and all to no purpose.

Thus disappointed, he abandoned for a while all hope of undertaking the cure of souls as a minister of the Church of England; but having subsequently obtained testimonials from some respectable beneficed clergymen in Wales, he made another effort to obtain ordination. Rowley, a large and populous parish, with a large church, four miles from West-Bromwich, was procured for him as a title, by one of his clerical friends. His testimonials were presented to the bishop of Worcester, in whose diocess Rowley was situated, having been first countersigned by the bishop of St. David's. The bishop of Worcester, however, refused to ordain him, even without permitting him to be examined; assigning as a reason, his want of an academical degree. A calm and dispassionate review of this whole business must inevitably conduct us to the conclusion, that the only obstacle to Mr. Benson's admission into the Church arose from the disposition that he had evinced, and the efforts which he had made, to promote the cause of evangelical Christianity among the ignorant and unenlightened population by which he had been surrounded. It is admitted that his conduct had been irregular: that is, he had sought to do good, and to save souls from death, independent of human authority, and without due submission to episcopal ordination; but he was now willing to conform to all the rules and regulations of the university; and this was the

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Benson is appointed to the London circuit—Mr. Fletcher's letter to him—His admission into full connection—Is appointed to the Newcastle circuit—Is removed to Edinburgh—Extracts from his journal—Letter to him from Lady Maxwell—Letter from Mr. Wesley—Is reappointed to Newcastle—Labours to suppress smuggling—Mr. Wesley's advice to him on the subject—Is stationed at Bradford—Extracts from his journal—Remarks on Thomas Walsh—Observations on watch-nights.

In pursuing our narrative, we now come to another eventful period in Mr. Benson's history; when he entered on an extended sphere of duty, and gave himself up more fully than he had previously done to the important and responsible work of the Christian ministry. In the year 1771, under the direction of Mr. Wesley, he became an itinerant preacher in the Methodist connection, and was appointed to labour in the London circuit. Methodism at that time was comparatively but little known; the total number of itinerant preachers in the whole kingdom was only about one hundred, and the tract of country included in the London circuit, where more than sixty itinerant preachers are now employed, had then only four; and the number of members, which at present amount to upward of twenty thousand, within that circle, were but two thousand four hundred and twenty. The London circuit at that time was widely extended; the walks were long, the facilities for travelling few, the labours hard, and the accommodations, in many of the country places especially, mean and scanty. But though Mr. Benson's life had been rather sedentary, and he had previously been unaccustomed to this mode of living, yet he willingly submitted to all the inconveniences, deprivations, and persecutions, in-

cident to his new sphere of duty, and endured hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

In the course of this year he exchanged several letters with Mr. Fletcher, who was then busily engaged in writing on the Calvinian controversy. In one of those letters, he had taken the liberty of advising him to use much precision in stating the Scriptural doctrine respecting works being the necessary fruits of faith. Mr. Fletcher's answer to this letter not only evinces the deep humility of his own mind, and the mean opinion he formed of himself as a writer, but the exalted idea which he entertained of Mr. Benson's understanding, and the profound deference he paid to his judgment. "I thank you," says he, "for your caution about works. I sent, last week, a letter of fifty pages upon Antinomianism to the book steward. I beg, as upon my bended knees, you would revise and correct it, and take off *quod durius sonat* (what sounds harsh) in point of *works*, (subject,) *reproof*, and *style*. I have followed my light, which is but that of smoking flax: put yours to mine. I am charged, hereabouts, with scattering firebrands, arrows, and death. Quench some of my brands, blunt some of my arrows, and take off all my deaths, except that which I design for Antinomianism. As I have taken up my pen, I will clear myself in another respect; that is, with regard to the Antinomian opposition made to Christian perfection. I have begun my tract, and hope to tell the truth in perfect consistency with Mr. Wesley's system. I once begged you would give me a copy of what you wrote upon it. Now is the time to repeat that request. Send it me* (with additions, if you can) as soon as possible. When I send my manuscripts to London, remember, it will be chiefly for your alterations and corrections."

The increase of numbers to the societies in the London circuit this year was very inconsiderable. How far the

* Paper written at Trevecca.

piety of the members was deepened, and their zeal for the promotion of the glory of God increased, we have no means of ascertaining. The state of religion in any place must not be estimated solely by the enlargement of its borders, or the inroads it makes on the territories of the enemy. There may be much doing where little appears to be done. Extensive preparations may be carrying forward, in a silent and unobtrusive manner, which will issue in results of incalculable importance. The earth doth not bring forth its fruit in a day; the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it. The seed that he now sows is to be reaped hereafter; and frequently one sows and another reaps. Methodist ministers, who itinerate from place to place, and who watch over societies in different circuits, have fewer opportunities of seeing the results of their labours, than those who are located and have a defined sphere of operation. The former may have many seals to their ministry, and souls converted through their instrumentality, with whom they have no acquaintance in this world, and of whom they will know nothing until the revelation of the righteous judgment of God: while the latter, whose labours are more circumscribed, and who minister uniformly to the same congregations, can form a tolerably accurate estimate of the full extent of their influence, by the accessions made to their several churches. But it should be recollected, that success is not the rule of duty, but only its encouragement. If ministers see the fruit of their labour, let them be thankful, and give the glory to Him to whom it is due. But if that pleasure is denied them, instead of yielding to discouragement, let them comfort themselves with the prophet, who when it was suggested to him that he had laboured in vain, and spent his strength for naught, confidently said, "Surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God."

At the following conference, held in Leeds, Mr. Ben-

son, who had been but one year *on trial*, as a probationer for the work of the ministry, was admitted into full connection. This shows the high opinion which Mr. Wesley entertained of his character as a Christian, and his talents as a minister.

He was at this conference appointed to labour in the Newcastle circuit. Here the exercises of his mind were various, and frequently discouraging. He often felt a painful consciousness of his want of that deep humility, and entire dedication of soul to God, which the requisitions of the gospel demand, and which he knew it was his privilege to possess. "O," says he, "how many precious opportunities have I neglected to improve, of getting and communicating good! How much more advanced in grace might I have been, and how many souls are still living in sin, which might have been converted by my instrumentality, had I been more diligent, and especially more humble and devout!" And subsequently he says, "I see that the praise of men is an empty bubble, and the honour of God only desirable. Those that honour him, he has promised to honour. If honour be the thing at which we aim, the sure and only way to obtain it is, to honour God." On the first day of the year 1773 he renewed his covenant with God; on which occasion he says, "My mind was much oppressed with a sense of my unprofitableness, both as a Christian and a minister of the everlasting gospel. I have not steadily aimed at God's glory, nor been wholly obedient and resigned to his will. But I have a strong desire to devote myself entirely to his service."

But though he felt much in himself of which he had to complain; yet in the work in which he was engaged he had much to afford him encouragement and delight. He had contant employment; the congregations were numerous; and the Lord frequently favoured him with peculiar enlargement of heart while he addressed them; and his

power was often exerted in awakening sinners, in comforting mourners, and strengthening the faith of such as had believed. In all cases, relative to the government of the societies, or in reference to any regulations which he thought it necessary to adopt, Mr. Benson was accustomed to consult Mr. Wesley, and to act according to his direction. In answer to one of Mr. Benson's letters, Mr. Wesley says, "It is a shame for any Methodist preacher to confine himself to one place. We are debtors to all the world. We are called to warn every one, to exhort every one, if by any means we may save some.

"I love prayer meetings, and wish they were set up in every corner of the town. But I doubt whether it would be well to drop any of the times of preaching. Three-and-thirty years they have had at least as much preaching at Bristol as at Newcastle. And the congregations are far larger than they were ten or twenty years ago. But I should not object to the transferring Wednesday night's preaching to eight on Sunday morning."

In the year 1773 Mr. Benson was removed to Scotland, and was stationed in the Edinburgh circuit. But though this appointment did not meet with his cordial acquiescence, yet in reference to it he says, "By the grace of God, I will, for the future, give up my own will whenever the will of God seems to appoint. I may be happy anywhere with resignation; but without it I can be happy nowhere." Mr. Wesley's authority, in the appointment of his preachers to their several stations, was absolute, but not capricious. He was intimately acquainted with the talents of the preachers, and he knew the general character of the congregations to whom they would have to minister. His decisions were therefore not the result of an arbitrary and despotic will, but of a sound and discriminating judgment, which employs the most eligible means to the accomplishment of a desirable end. For much of a

minister's usefulness must depend on the adaptation of his talents to the sphere of labour to which he may be appointed. The Head of the church rarely endows men with such a variety of ministerial qualifications, as to render them equally acceptable and useful to all classes of hearers. The people of Scotland are generally a well-educated people. Besides the private seminaries and great public schools established in their large towns and cities, every country parish has a school-master, regularly appointed in the same way as the clergyman, who receives a small salary, which enables him to educate the children of the parishioners at a rate easy and convenient even to the most indigent parents. And as it may be justly assumed, that the religious portion of the Scottish population were persons of cultivated minds, a reason may be seen for Mr. Benson's appointment to Edinburgh. Here his opportunities for mental improvement were abundant. He had more leisure time than could be afforded him in an English circuit. He had also access to the works of the most eminent theologians, and he was surrounded by persons of distinguished learning and piety. But amidst this profusion of privileges, he was so jealous of himself, as to be induced to say, "Alas! I fear I am not in my place. So little preaching, and so much study and retirement, are very pleasing to flesh and blood, and quite agreeable to my natural disposition. I find I could sit down here, and be very comfortable, at least as far as outward things could make me so. But then, where is the daily cross? Where is self-denial? Where is obedience to the command, 'Be instant in season, and out of season?'"

In the early part of January, 1774, he says, "I have spent nine weeks in Edinburgh, in general much to my satisfaction, and I hope to the profit of others. The Lord frequently opened my mouth, and enabled me to speak plainly and convincingly, concerning the fundamental truths

of the gospel. The power of God often attended his word, especially on Sunday evenings, when our congregations were large. I have reason to think some were awakened, some justified, and others built up in their most holy faith. And yet, upon reflection, I am quite ashamed of myself and labours. I see I might have been more devoted to God myself, and far more useful to others."

November 1st, he writes: "This day, as well as yesterday, I was fully employed in reading, writing, visiting the sick, and the public exercises of religion. I was kept all the day in sweet peace of mind; but I had not much joy, nor did I find such nearness to God as I did some days past. However, it is still my resolution to make his will my rule, and his favour my portion; and I doubt not he will give me all the comfort he sees necessary."

During Mr. Benson's residence in the northern metropolis, he was favoured with an opportunity of forming an acquaintance, and maintaining a correspondence, with that eminently pious and devout female, Lady Maxwell; and the following are extracts from two letters which he had the privilege of receiving from her:—

"*February 10th*, 1774.

"REV. SIR,—I am glad to see by your letter that you are still on stretch for God. Permit me to say, do not give up, on any account, a constant and lively expectation of every blessing Christ has purchased for you. A want of this expectation often, as it were, cuts the sinews of our endeavours, and then we sink into a supineness of spirit, which neither brings glory to God, nor comfort to our own souls. What greater encouragement to press on through every difficulty can we have, than the promises of a faithful God? Those promises are more stable than the pillars of heaven, or the laws of nature: the former may be shaken, the latter reversed; but to persevering faith it is impossible that any promise which God hath made

should fail of its accomplishment. Ought not a consideration of this to fire our souls with a holy ambition of gaining all that conformity to the divine will which humanity will permit? What a distinguished privilege is it, to have the whole image of God stamped upon the soul! For the possession of this precious jewel, what pleasure can be too great to forego! what suffering too keen to endure! Surely, did we form a just estimate of things, and weigh all in the balance of God, we should see this as the only object worthy of esteem, and continually pursue it with the whole ardour of our soul. But, alas! how often are we in danger of growing remiss therein! of having our attention called off, at least for a time, by trifles, or at best some fancied good! Against this great, but too common evil, we must continually watch, if we wish to enjoy constant peace in the ways of God, or make a progress in holiness.

"I will not say it is a misfortune to have fine feelings, but undoubtedly they subject the possessors to many painful sensations they would otherwise be free from. Such must have their delicacy daily and hourly shocked by all around them. But this is a cross which they must take up, and firmly sustain for Christ's sake, if they would be entirely devoted to God, and extensively useful. There is a remedy which some, who are unhappily cast in this mould, have found beneficial; viz., drawing back from the creature, and sinking into God; in other words, a being disunited in heart and life from created things.

"Remember, the greatest proof you can give of your own strength is, bearing with the weakness of others. Allow me to say, whatever we have a strong propensity to by nature, we are in danger of exceeding in. If your great love for retirement, and intense application to study, interrupt in any degree your communion with God, your constant looking to and depending on Jesus, or one labour of love, you are a loser both for time and eternity. I

believe we are safest, when at that work, in those places, and with those persons least pleasing to nature.

"I dare not say, that I possess all I wish for, and aim at, in the divine life; but, through abounding mercy, I maintain a constant sense of my union with Christ; enjoy a degree of communion with the Father of mercies; and my heart more and more burns with desire to glorify him in every possible way, but especially in the way of doing good to the bodies and souls of my fellow-creatures. I have, however, much cause to be ashamed before God, that I have proceeded no further in holiness. I am, Rev. sir, your friend in Christ, D. MAXWELL."

It appears from the following letter, that Mr. Benson had not heard from Lady Maxwell as often as he expected, and that he had mentioned this to her ladyship. In her reply, she says,—

"REV. SIR,—Unless you practically obey the gospel precept of judging, not by appearance, but right judgment, you will no doubt conclude that I have neglected your last letter, by being so long without answering it; but that is not the case. The matter-of-fact is, I am shy of corresponding with any one, and should be more so with those who put any value upon my letters. Human nature is so prone to self-approbation, that it is necessary to shun every occasion of increasing it, if we would be wholly devoted to God. Yet I could not think of being silent, lest you should mistake my motive. Nothing would prevail with me to write to any one, but an ardent desire, that less or more continually burns in my soul, to glorify God; together with a deep and permanent conviction that he can, and often does, give success to the most unlikely means for producing that end.

"You have great cause to be thankful to the Father of mercies, who has given you a child-like spirit, and made

you willing to learn from all. Whatever degree of wisdom any persons possess, they surely make a bad use of it, if they suppose they cannot be taught by any one. What innate beauty is in humility! What a heaven does it produce in the breast of its happy possessor! And man, sunk as he is in original depravity, must and does approve of it; even he finds he neither has it himself, nor can imitate it. 'Learn of me,' says Jesus, 'for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' O how little do the greater number of us know of this divine temper! or of conformity to our living Head in general! What mere dwarfs are we in the ways of God, swimming upon the surface of religion, when it is our privilege to sink into all the depths of humble love, and rise into all the life of God, all the heights of Christian confidence! O that He who dwells on high would baptize us all afresh with the Holy Ghost, as with fire! Then surely we should arise and shake ourselves from the dust, and give no rest to our eyes, nor slumber to our eyelids, till possessed of every blessing Christ has purchased for us. Let us, Jacob-like, wrestle with the Lord in faithful prayer, and we shall soon enjoy all the sweets of entire devotion, as far as humanity will permit. An excellent help to steadiness in this glorious pursuit is, the being abstracted in heart and life from the things of time and sense. Without this, we shall often grow weary, and, of consequence, remiss in duty, and then start aside, allured by the pleasing bait of some fancied good, till a kind Providence makes us feel the prickle in plucking the rose; and then we find our mistake, and come back to Him who giveth liberally, and upbraideth none, either with past unfaithfulness or present unfitness. O the depth of divine love!

"I am glad the work is prospering in Greenock. I wish you more and more success. I am, Rev. sir, your obliged humble servant, D. MAXWELL."

From Mr. Wesley, Mr. Benson continued to receive directions concerning his work. The following observations are extracted from Mr. Wesley's letters, written to him about this time:—"God has made practical divinity necessary, and the devil controversial. Sometimes we must write and preach controversially; but the less the better. I think we have few, if any, of our travelling preachers that love controversy. But there will always be men *ους δει επιστομιζειν**—Antinomians and Calvinists in particular. By our long silence, we have done much hurt, both to them and the cause of God."—"The more you preach abroad, both in England and Scotland, the better. Only take care, not to do more than you can do; not to go beyond your strength. And keep to the plain, old Methodist doctrine, laid down in the Minutes of conference. At Trevecca you were a little warped from this: but it was a right-hand error. You will be buried in Scotland, if you sell your mare and sit still. Keep her, and ride continually. Contrive (you and Mr. Thompson) how this may be. Sit not still, at the peril of your soul and body! Do all you can for poor Scotland; and write how things are there."—"I wish every one of our preachers who goes to Scotland were of the same mind with you. * * * I say still, we will have travelling preachers in Scotland, or none. The thing is fixed: the manner of effecting it is to be considered. Now set your wit to this. How shall this matter be accomplished? You did not well in selling your horse, and thereby laying another bar in the way. Though I am (by the exquisite negligence of my late book-keeper) a thousand pounds worse than nothing, I would have spared a few pounds to have eased that burden. However, you must do as you can. Our preachers shall either tavel there as in England, or else stay in England. Many persons are in danger of reading too little: you are

* Whose mouth it is necessary to stop.

in danger of reading too much. Wherever you are, take up your cross, and visit all the society from house to house. Do this according to Mr. Baxter's plan, laid down in the Minutes of the conference: the fruit which will ensue (perhaps in a short time) will abundantly reward your labour. Fruit, also, we shall have, even in those who have no outward connection with us."

The second year of Mr. Benson's continuance in Scotland, he was appointed the assistant of the Edinburgh circuit. This appointment was an additional expression of the confidence which Mr. Wesley reposed in him, especially when it is recollected that one of his helpers, at least, was senior to himself in the work of the ministry. A few extracts from his journal will be sufficient to describe the various exercises of his mind, and the unquenchable zeal with which he pursued his arduous labours during this year. January 1st, 1775, he says: "Upon a review of my temper and conduct the past year, I find I have much cause to be humble before God, on account of the small progress I have made in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the little use I have been of in the world. Considering the advantages I have enjoyed, how much holier might I have been! And considering the opportunities with which I have been favoured, how much more good might I have done! In my public exercises, I have not always had that dependance upon God for success, nor that earnest desire for his glory, which I ought to have had. What wonder then that I have done so little good? While I praise the Lord for sparing me another year, I cast myself upon his mercy, through Christ, for the pardon of what is past, and, trusting that he accepts of me, notwithstanding my great unworthiness, I dedicate myself afresh to him, desiring to live more to his glory, both inwardly and out-

wardly, than I have ever done. O Lord, accomplish my desire!"

June 24th, he writes: "I think, if ever I was led to pray for grace to deny myself, take up my cross, renounce my own ease, pleasure, and all the world, it was this morning. O how sweet it seemed to have fellowship with Jesus in his sufferings, and to be made conformable to his death! June 25th. This morning I found myself very weak in body, and apparently unable for the work of the day, having to preach four times: but glory be to God, he has graciously assisted me both in body and mind, and I have manifestly felt the truth of his promise, 'As thy day, so shall thy strength be.' O how often have I experienced of late the faithfulness of his word! For eight or ten weeks, I have generally preached four times on each Lord's day, and twice of those times to very large congregrations, in the open air; and yet I have found such vigour and strength of body, that it seemed to me I was as fit to preach, if not more so, after the labours of the day, as in the morning. O what cause have I 'to trust in the Lord, and not to be weary in well doing!'"

From the above quotations, it will be seen that Mr. Benson did not eat the bread of idleness during his continuance in Scotland. He was in labours more abundant; for though his work as an itinerant was more circumscribed, and less laborious, than it would have been in an English circuit, though he had not as many miles to travel, yet having many sermons to preach to the same people, and much to do in pastoral visitation, his time was fully and laudably occupied; and all the mental and intellectual powers that he could command were called into action. For those who were acquainted with Mr. Benson's character, need not be told that he was not like those of old, who brought the blind and the lame for sacrifice, or who offered unto God that which cost them nothing. His soul

was so fully in his work, and his best affections and devoted attention so entirely absorbed by it, that he deemed no sacrifice too costly, no labour too great, to be employed in furthering its interests. He neglected no means in preparing for the pulpit; his sermons were well arranged, closely studied, and admirably adapted to promote the present and everlasting welfare of the people of his charge. But knowing, as he did, that all human efforts are utterly unavailing, unaccompanied by the divine blessing, he placed his dependance for success entirely on God; and the sinners that were converted, and the souls that were saved from sin, through his instrumentality, afforded the most incontrovertible evidence that his labour was not in vain in the Lord.

The following year Mr. Benson was removed from Edinburgh to Newcastle. He had gone to Scotland with reluctance, but now he was as reluctant to leave it. He had derived so many advantages by his residence there, that in after-life, when any of the young men at our conferences objected to go to Scotland, he was accustomed to recommend it as the most favourable sphere of action, for mental improvement, within the whole range of our connection. The record in his journal on leaving Edinburgh is, "My heart is so united to this people, that I find it very hard to leave this place. I never was among a more loving and kind people than those in our society in Edinburgh. Many a happy and edifying hour have I spent among them. Many a time has my soul been blessed in answer to their prayers, and in meeting with them both in public and in private. May the Lord continue to favour them with his presence, and reward them for all their kindness to me."

Early in the month of August, 1775, he repaired to Newcastle, and met with a cordial and an affectionate reception from his old friends, among whom he had pre-

viously laboured with so much acceptance and success. That love of novelty so common to our nature, which the system of itinerancy is peculiarly calculated to foster, leading many of our people lightly to esteem the labours of those with whom they are intimately acquainted, and to attach an undue degree of importance to a change of ministers, obtained no influence in the minds of the Newcastle Methodists. They knew how to appreciate Mr. Benson's real excellence; his former services were fresh in their recollection; and though he had been absent from them but two years, they received him as an angel of God. He had not been in the circuit many days, before he was called upon, in the course of his ministerial duty, to pay the last sad tribute of affection to one who had departed in the Lord. In the funeral sermon which he preached on the occasion, he was peculiarly assisted by the unction from the Holy One. The divine power so accompanied the word, that, to adopt his own language, "the whole congregation seemed to melt before the Lord."

In the month of November, he received another letter from Lady Maxwell, of which the following is an extract:—

"Rev. Sir,—I received your obliging letter some months ago: a multiplicity of occurrences has prevented my answering it sooner, together with an almost unconquerable reluctance to writing. I hope the work of the Lord prospers in your hands, and that your own soul is more than ever alive to God, and that you enjoy all in him, and him in all. Nothing short of this can make us truly happy. I believe you are not only convinced of this, but enabled, in a good measure, to contend for the valuable prize. It requires much holy fortitude to fight continually, not only with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers; and this the soul must do, that would inherit all things. What the world calls happiness, is a mere delu-

sion; and any degree of it which a Christian seeks, exclusive of God, will sooner or later prove bitterness; I mean, if the glory of God is not the ultimate end he aims at in his pursuit. In fact, nothing merits the name of happiness but communion with the Father and the Son through the eternal Spirit. The whole world given in exchange for this would be a cheap purchase. What wisdom then to sacrifice every thing which would retard our progress in holiness! Surely through the power of sovereign grace, we may rise superior to the allurements of sense, and even the refined pleasure of science. Certainly there is enough in God to occupy the greatest genius, to employ the brightest parts, and the most improved understanding. O that all who are favoured with superior abilities would make the experiment! That you may be wise to make the best choice, and be steady in pursuing it, is the desire of,

"Rev. sir, your most humble servant,

"D. MAXWELL."

January 1st, 1776, Mr. Benson, according to his custom, renewed his covenant with God; on which occasion he made the following remarks:—"I see more clearly than ever, that a life of activity for God, of diligence, self-denial, and watchfulness, is vastly preferable to a life of contemplation and enjoyment. It appeared to me a matter of small moment, whether I was favoured with much or little consolation, if I was but entirely devoted to God's service." February 25th, he writes:—"Praise the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, praise his holy name! O how gracious has he been to me this day! He has strengthened me both in body and mind, far beyond my expectation. Yesterday I laid myself under an obligation to preach four times this day, merely out of a desire to do good; but at night, finding myself much indisposed, and fearing I should get no rest, my heart was like

to faint. However, I found power to cast my care upon the Lord, and he was pleased to give me refreshing sleep, and fit me for the duties of the day. I preached every time with much liberty, but especially in the evening at Newcastle, when I had the least confidence in myself, being quite exhausted in both body and mind, and to all human appearance utterly unable to preach. But the Lord gave me to renew my strength both of body and mind before I had well begun to speak. To him be all the glory."

But while Mr. Benson was diligent in his ministerial and pastoral duties, he was also careful to retain the knowledge that he possessed of the learned languages: for this purpose, he occasionally perused the works of Latin and Greek authors. "I have just finished," says he, on one occasion, "Homer's Odyssey. It is an ingenious poem, and in many places very entertaining, and even instructive; but I do not think it equal to the Iliad. But, alas! what are these boasted remains of antiquity to the sacred relics of Moses and the prophets, of Christ and his apostles! I prefer the Gospel of St. John, or even his short Epistles, to all the learning of Greece or Rome."

November 10th, he says: "Last night I got little or no sleep; and that, I believe, because I desired it inordinately, knowing that I had a hard day's work before me. But, blessed be God! though I was very poorly in the morning, and apparently very unfit for the labours of the day, yet has the Lord perfected strength in my weakness, and enabled me to preach three times with great enlargement of heart, and energy of expression. O that I could trust in him for ever!" Mr. Benson's experience in this respect was not peculiar to himself. The deep solicitude which many ministers of the gospel feel, in reference to the discharge of the onerous duties of their high and holy vocation, is known only to themselves and their God. Such has been the perturbed state of their minds, and their

anxious forebodings, in the contemplation of the work that lay before them, as to banish sleep from their eyes, and, with the patriarch of old, they have been "full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day." But such has been the unexpected and extraordinary assistance which the infinite Spirit has deigned to vouchsafe to them in hours of trial, that they have been induced individually to say,

"Better than my boding fears,
To me thou oft hast proved."

Nor is the anxiety of mind to which ministers are subject restricted exclusively to the exercises of the pulpit. In preserving the purity of the church, and the maintenance of ecclesiastical discipline, they often find themselves beset with difficulties. Were all the members of Christian churches thoroughly instructed in the duties of Christianity, and led in all lowliness of mind to walk as Christ also walked, the most painful acts of pastoral discipline would cease to exist. Cases would seldom occur to require the censures of the church. But alas! there are unworthy members in almost all Christian societies. Persons who are so ignorant, as not to know their duty; or so careless, as to neglect to do it; or so officious, as to interfere with the duties of others; or so insubordinate, as to violate the rules of the society to which they are united. And with persons of the latter description, Mr. Benson was grievously annoyed. It is well known, that the rules of the Methodist society prohibit "the buying or selling uncustomed goods." And by certain members, in one of the societies in the Newcastle circuit, these rules were totally disregarded. This could not escape Mr. Benson's knowledge, nor disapprobation. "Last night," says he, "I met with a severe trial indeed. For this half year past I have laboured with all my might to suppress smuggling in our society here, as a practice which, I am sure, is not only contrary to the

word of God, and our rules, but even to heathen honesty. I have often spoken against it in the society, and sometimes in the congregation; and now, at the desire of Mr. Wesley, I am examining the people particularly upon that subject, in visiting the several classes. On Wednesday evening I met with little or no opposition; most of those I spoke to being quite clear of blame, or resolving to leave off the practice in question. But last night, on the north side of the town, I found the case quite different, several opposing me with all their might, and especially Mr. ——, from whom I expected better things. My mind was so burdened with grief and care, that I could sleep little till after three o'clock in the morning; and all the past day, till about four in the afternoon, I was greatly oppressed. I was not conscious of having done any thing blame-worthy, or of having proceeded further than was my absolute duty; but I was distressed to think, that the society was likely to be torn asunder, and afraid lest I should be forced to exclude some of the principal members. I endeavoured to cast my care upon God, and went to church, it being Good-Friday, to receive the sacrament. I felt much brokenness of heart, a strong desire to devote myself wholly to God, and a measure of resignation to his will, and some peace, in a confidence of his favour, and the testimony of a good conscience. In the afternoon, on opening my mind to a friend, I was much comforted, and completely delivered from anxiety."

But though Mr. Benson's mind had been thus painfully exercised, by the prospect that he should be reduced to the necessity of excluding from the society several refractory members, yet, in the issue, he had the pleasure of finding that all his apprehensions were groundless, and that the event so painfully anticipated was never realized. Hence with devout gratitude he observes: "Blessed be God, he has been better to me than my fears. Things

here have ended greatly to my satisfaction. Yesterday I spoke closely to the society on the north side, and afterward referred it to them, whether they would give up smuggling, or leave our connection; and nearly the whole of them came to me for their tickets, with much brokenness of heart, and shame on account of their opposition to what is, certainly, for their own advantage." How forcibly does this circumstance instruct ministers, in the necessity and propriety of pursuing, with undeviating step, the path of duty! There is a time-serving policy, to which many are tempted cowardly to resort, in order to escape the cross; but though this mode of conduct may afford some temporary gratification, yet the wilful neglect of a known duty can scarcely fail to create ultimately the bitterest reflection of mind, and the most painful remorse of conscience. Mr. Benson, though a young man, whose courage had never previously been put to so severe a test, was enabled to maintain with unflinching integrity the rules of the connection; and thus put a stop to the nefarious practice of smuggling in the society. Mr. Wesley's advice to him on this occasion is well worthy attention. "You have now," says he, "a providential call to stand in the gap between the living and the dead. Fear nothing: begin in the name of God, and go through with the work. If only six will promise you to sin no more, leave only six in the society. But my belief is, a hundred and fifty are now clear of blame; and if you are steady, a hundred more will amend. You must, at all events, tear up this evil by the roots. 'The Word to a Smuggler' should be read and dispersed. And secure your fellow-labourers, that you may all speak the same thing. Go on; for God is with you." And in a subsequent letter, he says: "If any leader oppose, you see your remedy: put another in his place. Nay, if he does not join heart and hand; for he that gathereth not with you, scattereth. The total sup-

pression of that vile practice will, doubtless, be a difficult task: but it is worth all the labour; yea, though you should be obliged to cut off some of our oldest members. For you must absolutely go through with your work; leave neither root nor branch; else the reformation will be but for a season, and then the evil will sprout up again."

Mr. Benson remained two years in the Newcastle circuit; and toward the close of the second year, he paid a visit, for a few days, to his old and much-loved friends at Edinburgh. Here he was most cordially and affectionately received; and heard with devout attention, by large congregations of spiritually-minded people. But "while surrounded by numerous friends, the very sight of whom inspired him with pleasure," he felt unusually depressed in spirit. "How wisely," says he, "the Lord mixes bitters with our sweets, and amidst our prosperity and success sends us a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet us, lest we be exalted above measure! I have been received here with so much kindness and joy among my friends, and have had such liberty in preaching, and such large congregations to preach to, that I should probably have begun to think well of myself, had not the Lord visited me with ill health, and low spirits, arising from want of rest; a way which he often takes to humble and prove me. Lord, teach me resignation!"

June 23d, he says: "Last night, and this morning, I took my leave of a weeping congregation at Newcastle, composed of persons whom I affectionately love, and among whom I have laboured much to my satisfaction. To part was like tearing one's body asunder. Few could sing or look up for weeping; and I, who rarely shed tears, wept so as to be unable to speak. O Lord, do thou reward this people for their kindness to me!"

This year Mr. Benson attended the conference, which was held in Bristol, and which continued four days only.

A report had been widely and industriously circulated, that the Methodists were a fallen people; and though it was evident from the numerical returns that were then made, that they increased in number, yet it was said, that they decreased in grace. This subject was fully investigated; and the conclusion to which the preachers, with one exception only, unanimously came, was that the report had no foundation in truth; but that it was a slanderous accusation, fabricated by the enemies of Methodism. Mr. Fletcher attended this conference; of whom Mr. Wesley said, that he "was restored to life in answer to many prayers. How many providential ends have been answered by his illness! And perhaps still greater will be answered by his recovery." And of whom Mr. Benson said, "His appearance, his exhortations, and his prayers, broke most of our hearts, and filled us with shame and self-abasement, for our little improvement."

Mr. Benson was stationed this year at Bradford, in Yorkshire; a circuit which then included Halifax, and several other populous towns, which now form distinct circuits. His colleagues were Messrs. Hopper and Lee. Mr. Hopper he regarded with filial reverence: he had previously laboured with him in the Newcastle circuit, and from that time he had been in habits of confidential intercourse and correspondence with him. As their affection was reciprocal, they laboured together in great love, and maintained the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; and their ministry was so graciously owned of God, that large accessions were made to the societies throughout the circuit. Methodist ministers are pre-eminently one body; they are linked together more closely than the ministers of any other section of the Christian church; and their personal comfort, no less than their success, depends essentially on the love and forbearance which they exercise toward each other. Cases may

occur, in which they will be required to put on that charity which will cover a multitude of sins; and to bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfil the law of Christ. Following each other, as they regularly do, in their several circuits, they have frequent opportunities of rendering one another essential service. They hear the unsolicited opinions of the people concerning their colleagues; and can correct those opinions, if erroneous, or confirm them, if consistent with truth. There are persons who seek to establish their own reputation on the ruins of others. They cannot bear a rival. Jealousy, cruel as the grave, leads them to think that their own lustre is tarnished by the brilliancy of their brethren. And hence they labour to exalt themselves, by depreciating the worth of others. But the subject of this memoir was a man of another mind. The deep and self-abasing views that he entertained of his own defects, led him to esteem others better than himself. "O," says he, "how far am I short of the character of the first Christians and ministers of the gospel! I have read with prayer the first eight chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, at certain times this week; and I am confounded to find myself so far short of their experience. Lord, how long! Do thou undertake for me, and bring me nigh by the blood of the covenant; for I cannot bear to live in this state of distance from thee, whom my soul desireth. Surely, Lord, thou art no respecter of persons. O let me, like Peter, John, and Stephen, become full of faith and the Holy Ghost, that I may be a faithful steward of thy grace, and minister of thy word. Alas! how little progress I make! About six years ago, when at Oxford, my convictions and desires were the same that they are now; and then, as now, I longed for the baptism of the Holy Ghost." After having read the Life of Philip Henry, Mr. Benson devoutly says, "Lord, help me to imitate him, especially in private prayer, and family religion;" and under the

same date, he writes, "I am resolved to be steady in reading the Hebrew Bible, with prayer, till breakfast, every morning; and the Greek Testament, or some devotional piece, with prayer, from five until six in the evening. The rest of the day I hope to devote to reading, writing, visiting, &c., as shall seem most to the glory of God." Reflecting on the great honour which God put upon him, by employing him to minister the word of life to such crowded congregations, he says, "Lord, how highly am I honoured! Whereas that excellent man, Mr. Philip Henry, preached many good sermons, on the Lord's day, to four or five people, besides his own family; I have generally one thousand or fifteen hundred to preach to on that day, and two or three hundred often on the week-days; and yet how poor must my discourses be in comparison of his!"

At different seasons during the course of this year, Mr. Benson mentions his having been blessed with peculiar times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, while engaged in ministering the word of life. At Knowles, in addressing the congregation on the infinite willingness of Christ to save the chief of sinners, such a divine power attended the word, "that the whole congregation was melted into tears, and some, unable to contain themselves, cried aloud for mercy." And two days after he preached four times with great enlargement of heart. And on each of those occasions his hearers were deeply affected; and especially in the afternoon, when the congregation was unusually large, while he described the miserable condition of those who die in sin, and who at the day of judgment will be found wanting, when weighed in the balances of eternal justice. At the close of the year the following entry is made in his journal:—"Another year is now elapsed; and, blessed be God, though I have cause to mourn over many moments misspent, and many opportuni-

ties for doing good finally lost, yet I have cause to be thankful, that I find in my heart the peace of God which passeth all understanding."

It is impossible to peruse with any considerable degree of attention such extracts from Mr. Benson's journal as are here presented to the reader, without perceiving the genuine humility and deep lowliness of spirit which he possessed. Had he been at all disposed to cultivate any self-complacency, or vanity of mind, he might have found a pretext, or an apology, for the indulgence of such a disposition. His popularity was almost unbounded. His praise was in all the churches. Admiring multitudes thronged to hear him, and hung upon his lips with riveted attention. The power of God accompanied his ministry. The sighs, and groans, and tears of his auditors proclaimed the efficacy of his word. And the number of those whom God had made him instrumental in bringing to a knowledge of the truth, the children of his faith and prayers, were ready to rise up and call him blessed. Yet none of these things moved him. He arrogated to himself no praise for any of the works which God had done by him. He panted for no pre-eminence, except that of being pre-eminently good. February 8th, after having preached four times with his usual earnestness, instead of congratulating himself with the thought of having done his duty, he says: "I began, but I fear I have not ended, this day in the Spirit. The enemy has been too cunning for me. He, I fear, and not the Lord, has prompted me to exert myself in preaching so much beyond my strength, that I injured my breast, and brought a degree of guilt upon my conscience. I have not sufficiently attended to the declaration, 'Not by wisdom, nor by might, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.'"

February 28th, he writes: "I bless the Lord that he has richly rewarded me to-day for yesterday's labour,

when I only wished to be pardoned for not improving the day better. When I arose in the morning, I found a strong desire to spend the day in retirement and prayer; and during my morning devotions, the Lord drew very near, and comforted me much; but especially at and after breakfast, he shed his love very powerfully abroad in my heart, and gave me an indescribable hungering and thirsting after righteousness. I could do nothing but pray that I might be holy, as he who hath called me is holy. Every thing else appeared to me so insignificant as not to deserve a thought. O how I long to speak and think of nothing else! O how desirable that time appeared to me, when I shall glorify his name and do his will, without imperfection and without end!" March 15th, he says: "I have been, contrary to my unreasonable fears, much assisted this evening in publishing the glad tidings of salvation to a large assembly. I do not know that I ever was led to make so free an offer of a full, perfect, and universal pardon to all who would accept, in the way of repentance and faith, the inestimable blessing. This is properly preaching the gospel; and such doctrine as this I rejoice to preach, as the one foundation of my hope, and of the hope of every criminal." Halifax, March 19th: "The Lord is risen indeed; for he hath appeared to us this day in all our meetings. In the morning many wept, while I read how he made himself known to his disciples, on their way to Emmaus; and at noon my heart was enlarged, and I had liberty in preaching. But we had the most remarkable time at the love-feast. After we had waited a considerable time, and a few had spoken, my soul was drawn out, and my mouth so open to speak with power, that the whole congregation seemed greatly affected and broken down, and some cried out aloud. Lord, let not this fall to the ground." May 28th, he says: "This morning, while at prayer, the Lord graciously led me into

the way of faith; simple, easy, unreasoning faith; and set my soul quite free from all those doubts and fears which harassed my mind these two past days. This time of trial and heaviness has had its use. I have seen a little more into my exceeding weakness, and the need I have of continually looking to Him who hath promised to help in time of need. This indeed is the way, to expect nothing from myself, but every thing from him as my wants require." Thus the life that he lived in the flesh, he lived by the faith of the Son of God: and while he diligently and daily studied the word of God, that he might bring out of that divine treasury things new and old, he was not an inattentive spectator of the works of God. The beauties of visible nature excited his admiration, and with adoring gratitude he looked up "through nature unto nature's God." Being at a village near Halifax, June 10th, he says: "This afternoon I had a most delightful and retired walk on the banks of the pleasant river which waters this fruitful valley; and while the verdure of the fields, the song of birds, and the beauty of the landscape, the most delightful I ever beheld, cheered and regaled my senses, my soul ascended to the glorious Author of these wonders of creation, and praised and magnified the great source of beauty and perfection." Having, about this time, read two pamphlets on Infant Baptism, he remarks: "They at least show that it was the practice of the primitive church to baptize infants for three hundred years after Christ, as it was also the practice of the Christians from that time down to the Reformation. And this to me is a sufficient argument, that it was the custom of the apostles; otherwise, how could such an institution take place so near their times, and so universally?"

This year (1778) the conference was held at Leeds. The propriety of sending missionaries to Africa was then attentively considered. "The proposal was made in con-

sequence of two young princes, from Calabar, in Guinea, who desired that missionaries might be sent to instruct them in the English language, and the great principles of Christianity. These young princes had been cruelly torn away from their own country, and sold as slaves in America, where they remained seven years. An English master of a ship, to whom they told their story, pitied them, and advised them to run away from their master; which they did, and were brought by him to England. Their case was examined and brought before Lord Mansfield, and they were set at liberty. They made some stay in Bristol, and were instructed in the English language and the truths of Christianity, by some of our people. After they had returned to their own country, at their request, two persons, who were Germans, but members of our society in Bristol, were sent out for Guinea; but they both died, either before, or soon after, they landed on that coast: the young princes sent over petitions for others to go. Two good young men offered themselves for the difficult and dangerous service. But after the matter was seriously considered, it was concluded that the time had not arrived for sending missionaries to Africa." On what principle, or by what mode of argument, the conference drew this conclusion, we have no means of ascertaining. Reasoning from what we know, we cannot fail to draw a very different and opposite conclusion; and say, that the set time was then come for showing mercy to Africa. That the people of that degraded and cruelly-oppressed country needed Christian missionaries, and that Christian missionaries would have rendered them immense and incalculable service, for time and for eternity, no doubt can be entertained. The best returns that could possibly have been made to Africa for the unprovoked and reiterated wrongs inflicted on her children, would have been to send them the gospel. And here was an effectual door opened, and men ready to enter it, and,

at the call of God, to visit the most inhospitable clime, to save the souls of its inhabitants; but the conference, after serious consideration, came to the conclusion, that the time had not arrived for sending missionaries to Africa. But though missionaries were withheld, yet prayers, which "were manifestly attended with a great blessing," were offered on behalf of Africa. Since, however, the conference have done more for the sable sons of Ham, than pray for them: they have sent men to tell them words by which they may be saved; men who have not counted their lives dear unto themselves so that they might finish their course with joy, and the ministry which they have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And the Lord has worked with them, and confirmed the word by signs following; so that Ethiopia is now stretching out her hands unto God; and thousands of her children, who once were sitting in darkness and in the region of the shadow of death, have seen the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

At the conference above referred to, Mr. Benson was appointed to the Manchester circuit, which occupied a great part of the county of Lancashire. In the course of this year, he mentions the great profit he had derived by the perusal of the Lives of some eminently pious men; especially those of the Marquis de Renty, and Thomas Walsh. In reference to the former, though he was a member of the Church of Rome,—a church peculiarly corrupt and superstitious,—yet Mr. Benson says, "Alas! how far short do I come of the faith and hope by which he was animated! I am quite ashamed to see myself, with far greater advantages, at such a distance from that portion of divine love which he possessed." Thomas Walsh, who was a native of Ireland, had also been a Papist, but he had in early life renounced the errors of Popery, and subsequently became an itinerant preacher in the Methodist

connection. Mr. Wesley said of him, that he "was so thoroughly acquainted with the Bible, that if he was questioned concerning any Hebrew word in the Old, or any Greek word in the New Testament, he would tell, after a little pause, not only how often the one or the other occurred in the Bible, but also what it meant in every place. Such a master of Biblic knowledge I never saw before, and never expect to see again." And his piety kept pace with his classical attainments. Mr. Benson says, "I long to follow, though at a distance, that eminent servant of God. His fervency and constancy in prayer; his mortification and self-denial; his deadness to the world, and all it contains; his care to redeem the time, spending none of it in vain conversation or ceremonious visits; his recollection of spirit, and steady seriousness; his love of God, and zeal for his glory; his incessant labours for the good of souls; in short, his whole deportment in public and private, make me quite ashamed of myself, though at the same time I feel my soul athirst to follow him as he followed Christ."

In consequence of a visit which Mr. Benson received from a clergyman, with whom he had been previously and intimately acquainted, he was led to contrast his situation with that of a minister of the established Church. "The Lord," says he, "has made me very thankful for the daily opportunities he gives me of preaching his word, and meeting his people. And though in temporal things my situation is far less comfortable to nature than it would be were I a clergyman in the established Church; yet I have a larger field to labour in than any parish minister can have, and far more opportunities of doing good."

September 29th, he writes: "I have had a blessed season this evening in prayer, reading, and meditation. I have found my will sweetly resigned to the Lord, my heart devoted to him, and all my powers so impressed with his greatness and goodness, that I adored and praised him in

humiliation and love. I was particularly inspired with a spirit of prayer. O how my soul hungered and thirsted after righteousness, and to do and suffer all his will! I gave myself up wholly to his disposal, from a satisfactory conviction that he would make all things work together for my good, as I clearly saw he had hitherto done. I traced his goodness from my childhood, marked all his dispensations toward me, especially since my conversion to him, and owned they had all been well ordered, in infinite wisdom, and boundless love. I saw all my trials, though grievous to nature, had been the means of advancing me in grace, and had mightily wrought for my good." November 27th, he says: "This morning, while at private prayer, I enjoyed sweet peace and near access to God, and found much comfort in believing. But all this was little to what I found afterward, both at family prayer and all the day. My soul was, as it were, let into God, and satiated with his goodness. He so strengthened my faith, as perfectly to banish all my unprofitable reasonings, as well as doubts and fears; and he so filled me with humble, peaceful love, that I could and did devote my soul and body, health and strength, to his glory and service, only longing to spend and be spent for him. O how I longed to offend him no more! to do all his will, and to promote his glory! My heart and soul cried, 'Lord, make me holy and useful, and ordain concerning me as thou pleasest. Welcome trials, tribulations, and temptations, only do thou support me, and establish my soul in this peace.' O what a change has the Lord wrought in me! Glory be to God, I am a new creature; I am indeed put into the possession of a new nature. I now experience, that though no trial for the present is joyous but grievous, yet afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness. When I was last here, I was oppressed with heavy trials, but the Lord hath turned my sorrow into joy."

About this time he received a letter from the Rev. N. M. Cheek, with whom he had previously been on terms of great intimacy; an extract from which is here subjoined:—

"DEAR SIR,—I have snatched the first favourable opportunity of acknowledging, that notwithstanding our long absence, and the many miles' distance between us, yet my heart stands in the very same relation it did, to you, from the first of our acquaintance; and I should rejoice much to have the pleasure of seeing you once more in the flesh. You cannot think more frequently of me than I do of you; and I often think there is not a man I know that I would choose so soon to help me in the gospel as yourself. I have often thought how much it would please me to have it in my power to bring you into the Church; not that I believe you would be more extensively useful, but you would be useful in a way you cannot now. Did I not believe that, through God's mercy, I am enabled, in some sense, to serve him and his church where I am, I should quit my present for my former connections; for I still retain the same love and regard for all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. I rejoice greatly that you find yourself so happy, and so resigned to your present situation. O, my dear Benson, it matters not how we spend a short and uncertain life, so that we are approved by Him who gave it to us. I know in your way trials come thick, and crosses are both frequent and heavy; but great is the assistance that is promised Your own declarations testify that God comforts your soul, blesses your labours, and makes his work your delight. You find, then, that as your trials are, so are your comforts; and as your work is, so is your reward. Who would not labour for such a Master, and be faithful to such a Lord?"

January 1st, 1779, Mr. Benson, after having preached in Manchester, joined with the society in renewing his cove-

nant with God. This peculiarly solemn and devotional means of grace has been used by the Methodists from an early period of their history. August 6th, 1755, Mr. Wesley says: "I mentioned to our congregation in London a means of increasing serious religion, which had been frequently practised by our forefathers,—the joining in a covenant to serve God with all our heart, and with all our soul. I explained this for several mornings following; and on Friday many of us kept a fast unto the Lord; beseeching him to give us wisdom and strength, that we might promise unto the Lord our God, and keep it. On Monday, at six in the evening, we met for that purpose in the French church at Spitalfields. After I had recited the tenor of the covenant, proposed in the words of that blessed man Richard Alleine, all the people stood up in token of assent, to the number of eighteen hundred. Such a night I scarce ever knew before. Surely the fruit of it shall remain for ever." This service is now usually performed in all our large societies the first Lord's day in the new year; and is followed by the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's supper. And the numerous attendance, and seriousness of demeanour, evinced on these occasions, are the certain criteria of the deep interest that our people take in such services. Several things conspire together to render these devotional exercises peculiarly impressive. A retrospective view of the mercies with which our lives have been crowned, and the dangers from which we have been graciously delivered during the past year; and the solemn thought, that the year on which we have recently entered will, to some of us, prove our last,—that, ere its close, the period of our probation may terminate, and our state of unutterable glory, or of indescribable punishment, be eternally fixed,—can scarcely fail to impress our minds with a deep, death-like seriousness. And the covenant service that is read,—a service so deeply and exclusively devo-

tional in its character, so solemn, self-abasing, and lowly in its language,—with the prayers that are offered, the vows that are made, and the dear memorials of the Saviour's body and blood that are taken,—all tend to make an impression on the mind of the devout worshipper that cannot easily be effaced. Hence Mr. Benson speaks of this ordinance as being eminently beneficial to his own mind; and peculiarly calculated to awaken the most solemn reflections, and effect the happiest results on the minds of others.

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Wesley's visit to New-Mills—Remarks on the danger of much company—Mr. Benson's tour to the north—Preaches at different places—Visits his mother and sister—Reads Dr. Watts's Treatise on the Glory of Christ—Is accused of Arianism by Dr. Coke—Is examined at the conference—Is fully justified from this charge—Renounces the notion that he had entertained of the pre-existence of the human soul of Christ—Mr. Wesley's letter to him on this subject—His marriage—A letter from him to Mr. Pawson—His serious thoughts of retiring from the itinerant work—Remarks on late worshippers—Observations on different books.

In the spring of the year 1779 Mr. Wesley paid a visit to New-Mills, in Derbyshire; where, he says, "a commodious preaching-house, lately built, has proved a blessing to the whole country. They flock together from every quarter, and are thankful both to God and man." Here Mr. Benson met him, and enjoyed the privilege of his conversation, and also of hearing him preach; but, for want of watchfulness, he says, "My mind was not enough stayed on God; and, therefore, I profited but little in my spiritual interests: but while Mr. Wesley was meeting the society, I was much comforted; and also after supper, while he was praying with us." That sentiment of the

poet, "We should suspect some danger nigh, where we possess delight," is too frequently disregarded. The society of our Christian friends lays suspicion asleep: we dream of no danger when slumbering on the lap of pleasure. In company with those whom we esteem, we are usually off our guard, and are betrayed into the indulgence of a levity of spirit, a dissipation of mind, and a freedom of conversation, that savours more of guilt than gratification, in the review. We need as much to watch and pray, when associated with our Christian friends, as when surrounded by our ungodly enemies. Mr. Benson was feelingly alive to the danger of being often found in promiscuous society. Hence he says: "Being in company, and too little in private, I did not find such nearness to God as I did the last three days. If I have grieved thy Spirit, by neglect of prayer, or by unwatchfulness, Lord, do thou forgive me; and preserve, O preserve me from every known and secret sin!"

Early in the month of May, he set out on a visit to his friends in the north; and on his way he preached at Halifax, Bradford, Darlington, and divers other places. In this journey, God was eminently with him. The crowds that everywhere flocked to hear him were large and attentive. Many were deeply affected, while the tears of sorrow that were shed evinced the genuine contrition of the hearts of his hearers. After visiting his mother and sister, at Bishop-Aukland, he preached at Durham, Newcastle, Sunderland, and Alnwick; and returned to his circuit June 16th; when he makes the following entry in his journal: "And now the Lord has brought me back in health and peace to the place whence I set out, and was recommended to the grace of God by the prayers of the people. I have great cause to praise the Lord that he has preserved my body in health amidst much labour and fatigue, and has kept my mind in peace amidst much hurry; and, above all, that he

has been with me in my labours, and granted me, at most places, his favour and presence." Toward the latter end of June, he states that his mind had been greatly exercised by powerful temptations from the enemy; that he had been deprived of that liberty in preaching with which on former occasions he had been graciously indulged; and that he had little or no access to the throne of the heavenly grace; but early in July he experienced a signal deliverance, and he was enabled confidently to say, "Blessed be the Lord, he has once more brought his peace into my heart! This morning his light and love began gradually to cheer my disconsolate mind: he gently dispelled all my reasonings, and doubts, and fears, with which I had been oppressed, and enabled me to cast all my care on him; and all this day I have enjoyed a comfortable serenity." The Christian's life is a spiritual warfare. It is a fight of faith; his enemies are invisible: the seat of conflict is the inward man, and the soul is the great object of rivalry between heaven and hell. In this eventful struggle there are seasons of peculiar conflict; when the enemy thrusts sore at us that we may fall; and when, even to the most devoted Christian, the issue of the contest seems doubtful. Mr. Benson felt this; and when reflecting on his unfaithfulness, and the extensive requirements of God's law, he was led to exclaim: "Ah! my God, what will become of me? Shall I perish after all! Shall I pray, and preach, and travel, and labour incessantly for the good of others, and my own soul perish everlastingly!" The changes in Mr. Benson's state of feeling and Christian experience were considerable; but although he was alternately the subject of joy and sorrow, elevation and depression, yet his integrity of mind, his sincerity of heart, and his regard to the glory of God, as the ultimate object of his pursuit, knew no change, and was subject to no variation. In these respects he was steadfast, unmoveable, always

abounding in the work of the Lord. Hence, after having preached three times, and met many classes, September 2d, he says: "As my day is, so generally is my strength. To thee, my God, be all the glory! Only make me useful, and accept my poor labours, and of myself, as thy child; and I entirely resign to thee my body and soul, my health and strength, my time and talents. O my God, I do and will rejoice to wear myself out in thy service."

Few men have ever formed a more exalted idea of the character of the gospel ministry, or have brought to it talents of a higher order, than Mr. Benson; and few men have ever been more deeply conscious of the absolute necessity of obtaining divine aid in preparing for the pulpit, or of rightly discharging their duty in it, than he was. And to this may be attributed that self-accusation, and severity of judgment, which he pronounced upon himself, when he at all suspected that he had placed too much dependance on his own resources. September 19th, he says: "O when shall I learn experience from what I suffer! This morning I fell into the same mistake, or rather sin, I have often fallen into. Having made choice of that beautiful portion of Scripture, Deut. xxxiii, 26, &c., to preach from, and which I had formerly written upon; as if I could speak well from it without God's help, I went into the pulpit with too little desire for, or dependance upon, the divine aid: and the consequence was, as I might well expect, I was left to feel my own weakness; and I fear I was of little use to the congregation. I was afterward grieved that I had lost a precious opportunity of doing the people good, and spoiled a fine passage of God's word." The judgment which ministers form of their own sermons is not always correct. The ablest preachers are frequently the most sensible of their own deficiencies, and the most disposed to underrate their own work. And to hide pride from man, God sometimes employs the weak-

est instruments, and sanctions the feeblest performances, for the promotion of his glory. The divine word does not derive its efficacy from the mode of its delivery: and however desirable it may be for those who minister it to feel enlargement of heart, and liberty of speech, in declaring the whole counsel of God to their hearers, yet success is wholly of the Lord; for "neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase." The embarrassment, therefore, of a minister in unfolding his message of mercy, cannot form any certain data that his message is totally inefficacious; and ought not to lead him to conclude that he has laboured in vain, or spent his strength for naught. The hearers are frequently benefited under sermons of which the preachers are ashamed.

In the course of Mr. Benson's reading, a treatise, written by Dr. Watts, on the "Glory of Christ," fell into his hands. The object of this treatise is, to prove that the human soul of Christ existed for ages previously to its union with a human body. To this doctrine Mr. Benson became a convert; as it appeared to him a key to divers passages of Scripture, and well calculated to reconcile sundry texts which, without it, seemed irreconcilable. Having spoken his mind freely upon this subject, he became suspected of being an Arian; and was soon warmly attacked, and represented as an Arian all over the kingdom. Dr. Coke, especially, with a laudable zeal for orthodox Christianity, and particularly the doctrine of the eternal deity of Christ, wrote him a letter, in which he accuses him of having embraced the Arian heresy. This gave rise to a dispute and a controversy between them. And the business was deemed of so much importance, that at the ensuing conference, held in Bristol, the subject was mentioned. But Mr. Wesley would not allow it to be debated in open conference, but very judiciously appointed a

committee of the preachers to investigate it on the following day. "In the afternoon of that day," says Mr. Benson, "we met the committee, whose unanimous and clear opinion was, that I was no Arian; and that Dr. Coke had no ground for speaking and writing of me in the manner he had done. He seemed very sensible of it, and offered to ask my pardon before them all." On the following morning the committee presented their report to the conference, and Mr. Benson and Dr. Coke shook hands in token of mutual reconciliation. Still Mr. Benson retained the opinion that the soul of the Redeemer existed before all worlds, as the first-born of every creature; and was, from its first existence, in the most perfect union with the Father's Godhead, or with his eternal *Wisdom*, or Word. But some years subsequently, he was appointed to make additions to certain manuscripts, which Mr. Fletcher had left in an unfinished state. "I then," says he, "at first thought to introduce the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ's human soul; and wrote some pages for that purpose, but, after mature consideration, waved it, for the following reasons:—1. I believed it my duty to keep close to the Bible, both as to sentiment and expression, and I could not find in it any such expression as the pre-existent soul of Christ. 2. I reverenced the doctrine of the primitive church, I mean, as handed down to us in the writings of the ancient fathers, during the three first centuries, as the best interpretation of the Scriptures; and I found no such sentiments or expressions used by them. On the contrary, they universally speak as though the whole human nature of Christ, his soul as well as his body, were derived from his virgin mother, though by the power of the Spirit of God; representing him as the seed of the woman, as the seed of Abraham, and of David, and as *very man*, which it is certain he could not have been, if his soul, which is the better half of man, had not been human, but of quite

another nature and origin. 3. I found what I had not at all adverted to at first; viz., that for me to suppose his soul to have pre-existed would involve me in a great, and, I now think, an inextricable difficulty. It would oblige me to suppose, that it was reduced to almost, if not altogether, perfect non-entity, upon its first union with the flesh, in the virgin's womb. For it must have been deprived of all thought, and all *consciousness;* and what can remain of a spirit, whose thought and consciousness cease, is hard, if not impossible, to say. Add to this,—4. That we know that Jesus increased in wisdom as well as stature, and in favour with God as well as man, and waxed strong in spirit: all of which is perfectly intelligible, on the supposition, that his whole humanity was from his mother, and that he grew up like another child; but very difficult to be conceived, supposing his soul existed before all worlds, high in the favour of God, and was from its first creation possessed of knowledge and power to us inconceivable. These considerations, as well as an unwillingness to throw out any sentiment which might kindle strife among us, made me determine, after many months' mature consideration, to wave saying one word about the pre-existence of Christ's human soul." He further adds, "The *Logos* of St. John, termed, chap. i, 14, *the only begotten of the Father*, and *the Son of God*, are not two persons, but *one* and the *same:* and all the ancient fathers considered him in this light before, and indeed after, the council of Nice; and the whole stream of Christian antiquity, together with the greatest modern divines, at home and abroad, the reformers, in particular, to a man. Now, surely the catholic church is not to be dissented from lightly; and I am sure, not out of deference to so fanciful a writer as Mr. Fleming, many of whose expositions, I think, are as perfectly unreasonable and unscriptural as they are singular." From hence it appears that "when he came to look at the sub-

ject in all its aspects and bearings, he saw, that the divinity of our Lord, which he always believed to be a Scriptural verity, could not be maintained against so acute an assailant as Dr. Priestley, without the complete abandonment of his former explanatory and conciliatory speculations; and he did completely and for ever abandon them, and successfully defended the *old doctrine* in the *old sense*, the sense in which the catholic church has held it from the beginning."

Mr. Wesley's letter to Mr. Benson, on the above subject, is well worthy of the reader's attention:—

"*Bristol, September 17th*, 1788.

"DEAR JOSEPH,—I am glad you have determined to correct Mr. Fletcher's letters. You will observe that it is 'dangerous on such subjects to depart from Scripture, either as to language or sentiment:' and I believe, that 'most of the controversies which have disturbed the church have arisen from people's wanting to be wise above what is written; not contented with what God has plainly revealed there.' What have you or I to do with that difficulty? I dare not, will not, reason about it for a moment. I believe just what is revealed, and no more; but I do not pretend to account for it, or to solve the difficulties that may attend it. Let angels do this, if they can; but I think they cannot. I think even these

'Would find no end, in wandering mazes lost.'

Some years since, I read about fifty pages of Dr. Watts's ingenious treatise upon the 'Glorified Humanity of Christ.' But it so confounded my intellects, and plunged me into such unprofitable reasonings, yea, dangerous ones, that I would not have read it through for five hundred pounds. It led him into Arianism. Take care that similar tracts (all of which I abhor) have not the same effect upon you.

"I am, with love to sister Benson, your affectionate friend and brother, JOHN WESLEY."

As a proof that Mr. Benson in after-life retained the same opinion concerning the divine sonship of our Saviour, he says, October 13th, 1789: "I am more and more confirmed in the belief that our Lord was the Son of God before his incarnation, and that the appellation is given to him in a sense not applicable to any creature. I found it very refreshing to my soul to view him in this light, and had a very comfortable sense of his willingness to save all that come to God by him."

Mr. Benson had now laboured in the Methodist ministry for about eight years in an unmarried state; not from any Popish or superstitious notion that he had entertained, that there was any moral obligation imposed on ministers to continue in a state of celibacy; or from any idea that he must necessarily be less holy, or less useful, in a married than in a single life; but because he knew that a step so important, on which his future happiness and usefulness essentially depended, required much serious thought, and prayerful deliberation; or because he had not met with a person who possessed such qualifications as he conceived a help meet for him ought to possess. For it must be universally allowed, that a minister's wife is peculiarly circumstanced. She holds a conspicuous place in the church; and duties devolve upon her of great responsibility. She is not only bound to soothe the sorrows and comfort the heart of her husband, but to be in her behaviour as becometh holiness; to look well to the ways of her household, and to be a pattern of good works to the members of his flock; and so to demean herself, that the ministry be not blamed; for the delinquencies of a wife cannot fail to reflect great discredit on her husband; and many a worthy and exemplary man has had his life imbittered by the imprudent, not to say criminal, conduct of his partner.

Mr. Benson, however, having now met with a person

whom he deemed every way suitable for him as a companion for life, he was "joined," to use his own language, "in holy matrimony to Miss Thompson, in the parish church at Leeds, in the presence of Miss R——, and a few other select friends," on January 28th, 1780. And, in reflecting on this event a few days subsequently, he says: "I have been much employed in looking back upon the way the Lord has led me into this near and intimate union; and I find that I have infinite reason to adore his grace and goodness in the whole affair from first to last; for divine Providence has visibly appeared in it, and again and again has God most remarkably answered prayer. O that we could therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works unto the children of men! For his goodness to me I can never sufficiently praise him."

The following contains an extract from a letter written by Mr. Benson to Mr. Pawson, on the erroneous notions which some entertain concerning justification:—

"*April 27th*, 1780.

"My Dear Brother,—I take the liberty of writing to you again, because I wish to consult you upon a subject which for some days past has exercised my mind no little. In the course of my reading, I have been looking over Mr. Wesley's former Journals again; and as I proceeded I could scarcely avoid drawing the conclusion, that many of us have departed in doctrine and experience from the faith to which Mr. Wesley, and others, then bore their testimony. Have we not, to leave room for a second blessing, set justification too low, by allowing that a person may be justified from all things, who has neither the witness nor the fruits of the Spirit, neither peace, sensible peace with God, nor power over outward sin? Or, if we affirm that all must have these at first, as evidences and fruits of

justification; do we not allow many to think they are in a justified state, who are now, and have been for years, as truly devoid of these, as if they had never received them? And if so, do we not mislead our hearers, and cry, 'Peace, peace, when there is no peace?' There is no peace to the earthly, sensual, or devilish; to the proud, the passionate, the covetous; to the carnally-minded, the lovers of the world, the unholy. And if we encourage such, directly or indirectly, to believe that they are justified, and of course children of God; do we not encourage them to believe that without holiness they may see the Lord? For certain it is, he that is a child of God hath everlasting life. If, therefore, I teach that a man may be justified, and yet be carnal, unholy, and unrenewed, I teach that a man may be carnal, unholy, and unrenewed, and yet dwell with God. I doubt not that there is weak as well as strong faith, and that a man is made a babe in Christ before he is a young man or father; but I ask, whether any are properly and savingly Christ's who have not crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts? whether they are so in Christ as to be free from condemnation, who walk after the flesh, not after the Spirit; who are not new creatures; the Spirit of life from Christ Jesus not having made them free from the law of sin and death? Hath not Jesus assured us, if he shall make us free, we shall be free indeed? Hath not St. Paul confirmed his Master's declaration, affirming, 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty?' And hath not St. John borne the same testimony, in declaring, 'He that is born of God overcometh the world, and doth not commit sin?' And in the mouth of these three witnesses, is it not established, that it is a greater thing than many imagine to be truly justified, and made children of God?"

On this doctrine, he subsequently makes the following remarks:—"I have been profited to-day by reading some

of Luther's sermons, which I think set justification by faith in the clearest light, and are particularly calculated for the comfort of those who mourn under a sense of sin formerly committed, or of the imperfections that still cleave to them. He discourses so sweetly and convincingly concerning the goodness of God, and encourages all lost sinners to put an entire confidence therein, in such a manner, that it is hardly possible to resist his arguments, or to retain any doubts or fears. I found my faith greatly strengthened by what I read; and I saw more clearly than ever the great importance of such doctrine." Afterward he says: "I have been both instructed and comforted by reading more of Luther's sermons; and I have found a strong desire that the Lord would enable me to preach more than ever in this way; which I see to be both according to Scripture and experience. One of the sermons I have read to-day is on prayer; and I stood condemned by it, having, alas! too frequently prayed without faith."

In 1780, and the three following years, Mr. Benson was stationed in the Leeds and Bradford circuits. In the course of these years, he frequently had the pleasure of seeing the work of the Lord prosper in his hands. Even when he was ready to reproach himself for some culpable defect in his ministry, the Lord often cheered him by the visible tokens of his approbation. Being at Harwood, April 26th, he says: "This evening I discoursed upon John xi, 25, 26. After I had finished, and was ready to conclude that my labour was in vain, fearing I had chosen an unsuitable subject; a young man, unable to contain himself, broke out in praise to God for shedding his pardoning love abroad in his heart. He called upon us all to praise God in his behalf. While he spoke, which he continued to do for a considerable time, many on all sides were melted into tears, and with him rejoiced in the Lord their Saviour. O who can doubt such a testimony, when

given in such simplicity, and in terms so artless and unadorned? Glory be to thee, O Lord, for these plain manifestations of thy presence."

In the early part of the year 1782, in the prospect of having a family, he entertained serious thoughts of retiring from the itinerant work, and of establishing a boarding-school for the education of youth. There were several causes that conspired to induce him to meditate this change in his situation. He was constitutionally fond of retirement. His closet and his study were inexpressibly dear to him; and hence the changes incident to the itinerant life, and the promiscuous society into which he was frequently and unavoidably thrown, were irksome and disagreeable to him. On this account, he disliked the bustle occasioned by the business and engagements of our annual conferences. On one occasion he says: "Our conference is now over, and I shall return to the sweetness and comfort of silence and retirement. This hurry does not suit me; it is not good for either my soul or body. However, I have cause to bless God, that I have been preserved in health and peace; and that I have found some of the sermons, especially those preached by Mr. Fletcher, very edifying."

It should also be recollected, that sixty years ago, which was about the period referred to, the provisions made for the married preachers were by no means as ample as they are at present. The circuits were wide, and the rides long; and absence from home, in many cases for weeks together, was unavoidable. Domestic enjoyments were rare, and of short continuance; and where there were large families, the thought that the whole burden of care and government rested on the mother, must to a man of sensitive mind, and a sympathetic heart, have been extremely painful. And besides this, the funds that were raised by the people for the support of those preachers who were

worn out in their Master's service, and for the widows and children of those who had fallen in the work, were very inadequate to their necessities. These things induced Mr. Benson to think, not of abandoning the work of the ministry, or of burying his talent in the earth, but of exercising it in a more local and circumscribed sphere of operation. But from a deep and settled conviction, that the change he meditated might involve consequences of a most eventful character, and lead to results that eternity alone could disclose, he was constrained to pray for divine direction, that he might not miss his providential way. Hence he says, April 17th: "I spent a great part of the forenoon in prayer, as for other things, so especially for direction whether I ought to set up a boarding-school, or continue to travel. After much prayer and consideration, it seemed clearly to be my duty to continue to travel, at least till my family be so large, if it ever should be so, as to render it very troublesome to remove from place to place. This appeared to be my duty: 1st. Because the Scripture directs every man to abide in his calling, unless there be some good and sufficient reason for leaving it; and if *every man*, then much more a minister, whose calling is the most useful and important of any, and ought not to be relinquished without a manifest necessity, not only not altogether, which I had no thought of doing, but not in any degree. 2dly. Because it is probable it will be better for the souls of both myself and my wife to abide as we are, than to encumber ourselves with the care of a boarding-school. And, 3dly, and especially. It is not probable I shall be as useful in any other situation whatever, as this in which I am at present. For these reasons, I found my mind quite determined to pursue my present plan, at least till there should appear a greater reason for leaving it than yet exists. But had I not been determined, the following providential occurrence would undoubtedly have deter-

mined me." The circumstance here alluded to was the death of a daughter, who died a few days after her birth. "I found," says he, "a desire for her living, and yet was resigned to part with her, from a conviction that she had not been born, nor would she die, in vain, but would glorify God in a better world. I knew that if she lived, she would be to us a certain care, and a very uncertain comfort; that if she died now, she would glorify God in that kingdom which is made up of little children, and such as have obtained a similar disposition. I therefore gave her up to God; and, blessed be his name, my wife was enabled to follow my example."

Mr. Benson had been greatly annoyed, at different times, by the indecent custom which many indolent and lukewarm professors had contracted, of coming to worship after the service, and even after the sermon, had begun. "At noon," says he, "I was much grieved to see the greatest part of the congregation come late, both for their own sakes, and because they disturbed the attention of others. I spoke very plainly to them, and warned them of the danger they seemed to be in of despising or neglecting the word of God; and applied very closely the subject I had discoursed upon." And a few days subsequently he says: "In the evening I explained how true Christians are the epistle of Christ, and how we become such. I had much liberty in speaking, till near the conclusion, when several well-dressed strangers, who came in, disconcerted me a little, through a fear, that as they had not heard the explanation of the text, the application of it would appear nonsense to them: and I was exceedingly burdened with care, lest by their coming in so late, instead of receiving any profit, they should be prejudiced against the truth." The practice here referred to cannot be too severely reprehended: in some solitary instances it may be excusable; circumstances may occasionally transpire, which render

punctuality at the house of prayer impossible. But late attendance on religious worship is generally the effect of inattention and carelessness, which, by repeated acts, has grown into a habit. Hence many persons never think of quitting their habitations until the time has arrived when they should be in the house of God; and by thus coming in at an unseasonable hour, they interrupt the worship of those who desire to wait upon the Lord without distraction; they tempt others to sin by their bad example; they embarrass the mind of the minister, and render his sermon less profitable to the congregation. They get little, if any, good themselves; and it is very questionable, whether they would not be less culpable in abandoning the house of God altogether, than in thus visiting it to disgrace themselves, and to interrupt the devotions of those who desire to worship God in spirit and in truth.

September 13th, 1782, Mr. Benson preached at Bradford, from 2 Cor. iii, 5, 6. "From these words," he says, "I warned the congregation against three things. 1. Against depending upon us for help. 2. Against despairing of help from God. 3. Against mistaking the nature of our office as 'ministers of the covenant.' 4. Against resting in the literal knowledge of all this, and stopping short of experience." And a few days afterward he says, "This evening I had many hearers; but for want of having fixed on a subject beforehand, I was distracted in my mind, and did not speak with such comfort as I am in the habit of doing. It is generally best with me, when I can fix, at least an hour* before, on what to preach from; then, by meditation and prayer, I get the subject impressed upon my mind; and entering into the spirit of it, I am able to treat it with more clearness and power."

* Most preachers, especially those who are young and inexperienced, should occupy much more time than "an hour" in digesting a discourse even upon the plainest text.—*Amer. Ed.*

On the duty of fasting, as a Christian ordinance, he has not only declared his approbation, but he exemplified it in his practice. Hence he set apart Friday, October 4th, to seek the Lord by prayer and fasting. And he says: "Blessed be his name, I did not seek him in vain. He drew my heart out in thankfulness to him for many mercies, spiritual and temporal; and while I saw myself utterly unworthy of the smallest favour, and was deeply humbled before him, my soul praised him with joyful lips. O how I longed to live to his glory, and to be filled with his Spirit!"

December 3d he availed himself of an opportunity of visiting his old friends at Leeds, among whom his ministry had been so signally and graciously owned of God. On this occasion he says: "Blessed be God, I have not stayed in Leeds over to-night in vain. The Lord has been pleased to give me great freedom in preaching. The congregation, which was large, was, in general, much affected, and one woman appeared to be thoroughly awakened. I conversed a little with her in the vestry, and appointed her to meet me in the morning." She had come from the country, and had been in the habit of attending the ministry of the word, but had heard it in vain. Her father, who was a pious man, had often exhorted her to seek the salvation of her soul, but she had hitherto disregarded his advice. She met Mr. Benson the following morning; and now, says he, "the Lord was so pleased to awaken her, that she was distressed beyond measure, and she resolved to give herself up to God, and join the society without delay."

April 13th, 1783, he says: "I spent some time in prayer, and my soul panted after the divine likeness. O what an amiable and admirable thing it appeared to me to be holy! I found it sweet to recount the Lord's mercies, and to praise him for them all, and particularly for calling

me to the high and holy office of preaching his gospel, and for giving me to see some fruit of my labours. I cried unto the Lord for a large portion of his Spirit, and was not without hope that I should see better days. I felt myself perfectly contented with my situation and circumstances, and truly thankful that the Lord had given me neither poverty nor riches. I prayed that he would continue his loving-kindness to me, and keep me disengaged from all below."

The subsequent pages in this chapter will be occupied in describing Mr. Benson's reflections on a few of the books which he had read.

"I spent the afternoon in the fields, reading the 'Voyages of Columbus,' and meditating upon the vanity of all earthly things, and the folly and madness of mankind, who traverse sea and land, exposing themselves to hardships of every kind, and encountering dangers and deaths, to gain that which, when gained, only imbitters their joys, and increases their misery. Poor Columbus discovered a new world, but found as little happiness in it as in the old. Cares and labours, want of rest, hunger, change of climate, and various other inconveniences, broke his constitution, and ruined his health; while the ingratitude of some, and the treachery of others, the unkindness of friends, and the malice of enemies, broke his schemes, disappointed his hopes, and rendered him truly miserable; and so much the more in proportion to his dignity and elevation. O what a rest, what a felicity, to be delivered from covetousness and ambition, and to be content in whatever circumstances we are placed!"

Having read Mr. Wesley's reply to Dr. Middleton's "Free Inquiry," Mr. Benson says: "It is well written, and very useful, especially the account he gives in the conclusion, of a Christian, of Christianity and its evidences."

At Wetherby, he says: "I have spent this day in reading Bishop Lowth on Isaiah, and comparing his translation with the Hebrew text. He takes great liberties with the original; I think, rather too great sometimes. However, in general, his alterations of the text, and his remarks upon it, are very just, and well worthy the attention of the learned."

Of Dr. Delaney's "Revelation examined with Candour" he remarks: "It is a most excellent, and useful work, and sufficient to convince any infidel of the divine authority of the Scripture."

January 9th, he observes: "I was much profited this morning by reading and considering a part of Scougal's work, entitled 'The Life of God in the Soul of Man;' a book which I never read in vain. O how amiable is the religion which he describes! But how far am I from possessing it fully and constantly!"

February 5th: "Taking up Joseph Alleine's Letters, and reading a few pages in them, I was much humbled under a sense of my unfaithfulness. O how far short do I come of the zeal and fervency of this servant of God! O Lord, stir up my languid desires after thee, and the salvation of precious souls!"

Having read Dr. Priestley's "Harmony of the Gospels," Mr. Benson says: "By 'Satan,' he understands everywhere the principle of evil personified; and by all the demoniacs in the gospels, he understands lunatics. He gives many strange and extravagant expositions of the sacred text, such as it is not easy for any but infidels to believe. What I read produced many reflections in my mind concerning the ignorance and weakness of many, who are capable of admitting the most strange and absurd opinions in matters relating to religion."

Of Mr. Wesley's abridgment of Mosheim's "History of the Church" he says: "I have read it with much

pleasure, and found many parts of it very profitable. But alas! the true church, the company of the faithful, who truly loved and feared God, has in all ages been comparatively few."

September 6th and 7th he spent in perusing Saurin's "Sermons on the Attributes of God." "These subjects," he says, "he treats admirably well; with great depth of penetration, and clearness of method: his style, as far as one can judge from a translation, is pure and easy, and the whole composition above the common class of writers. By what I have read of him, I have been much edified."

Having finished Xenophon's Life of Socrates, he observes: "I have read the whole book with pleasure and profit. It, however, pained me to find in Socrates, amidst all his good qualities, an appearance of great pride; speaking of himself, even before his judges, as the wisest and best man upon earth. Were it not for this, I should admire him as the best heathen that ever lived."

After having read several chapters of St. Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians, in the Greek Testament, he says: "I found I had infinite cause to be ashamed of myself, that after so many years' profession, I was at such a distance from the spirit and conduct of the apostles; so wanting in love to Christ and the souls of men, and doing so little to save sinners." And subsequently he says: "I think, I never understood it so well, nor relished it so much before. It is indeed in all respects an admirable epistle. It breathes, from the beginning to the end, the most earnest concern for their welfare to whom it was written; and it is most admirably constructed in all its parts, so as to reprove them for their faults, and urge upon them disagreeable duties, without giving them offence. Indeed, such a mixture of love and plain-dealing is nowhere else to be found; not even in any other parts of the oracles of

God. And how striking is the account the apostle gives of his own sufferings, which yet he does with reluctance! Ah! how did it make me ashamed of myself, who have hitherto done or suffered nothing, comparatively speaking! But yet the Lord knows it is my desire not to live in vain."

In the same month he finished reading, in the original language, the Books of Moses. From the book of Deuteronomy, especially, he professed to derive great comfort and edification. "What a wonderful man," says he, "was Moses! What amazing wisdom, courage, and steadiness did he possess! How extraordinary his zeal for the glory of God, and his love to the people of Israel! With what patience did he bear with their manners; and with what faith intercede for their welfare! With what near access to God, and deep communion with him, was he favoured! And what mighty works did the Lord enable him to do! And what great things were effected by his instrumentality!"

About this time, Smollett's "History of all Nations" fell into his hands. He observes, concerning that work: "I have been entertained and profited by what I have read. My ideas of God's works have been enlarged; and my soul has been drawn out in thankfulness to the Lord, for having cast my lot in fairer ground; where we enjoy every advantage for life and godliness, and escape many of the miseries to which the inhabitants of those inhospitable climes are subject." And subsequently he adds: "I thought much upon my own situation, wandering to and fro, and never remaining long in any place. My relations whom I had left; my father, whom I never saw after I bade him farewell on Alston-Moor; my mother, whom I attended to her grave; my deceased sister's children, whom, when at home with my parents, I was wont to love much;—they all came into my mind, and affected my

heart with much tenderness. O my God, I am a stranger and a sojourner with thee! And there is no wisdom but in employing human life to thy glory."

CHAPTER V.

The Deed of Declaration made—Several of the preachers offended—Extracts from Mr. Benson's journal—Mr. Wesley invites him to the London conference—Is excused from attending—Death of Mr. Fletcher—Erection of George-yard chapel, in Hull—Mr. Benson publishes a Scriptural Essay on the Immortality of the Soul—Mr. Edmondson's account of Mr. Benson's popularity—Extracts from his journal—He attends the conference in Leeds; preaches there—Is disappointed at not going to the circuit to which he had been invited—He attends the conference at Bristol, the last at which Mr. Wesley presided—Account of his death—The Birmingham riots.

A CIRCUMSTANCE occurred about this time which created much uneasiness, and sowed the seeds of dissension among the preachers. Mr. Wesley was now in the eighty-second year of his age; and though, according to his own apprehension, he was as strong as he was at twenty-one, yet knowing that, according to the course of nature, he must soon go the way of all flesh, he felt it necessary to make provision for the perpetuation of that work which God had made him the honoured instrument of originating and carrying on in the world. Hitherto, the power of appointing the preachers to their several circuits was vested entirely in himself. Nor did he suffer any point of doctrine, or rule of discipline, to be determined by the popular vote: it was, however, agreed, that after his decease the power which he possessed should be transferred to the conference. But the conference, from its commencement, had consisted merely of persons whom he had invited to meet for the purpose of conferring with him;

and, of course, at his removal it would cease to exist, unless the term was distinctly defined, and the persons nominated who should compose the conference. Thus circumstanced, Mr. Wesley was induced, February 28th, 1784, to execute THE DEED OF DECLARATION; constituting one hundred of the itinerant preachers, whose names were all inserted in the deed, "the conference of the people called Methodists." This deed was enrolled in his majesty's high court of chancery. The design of this was to give a legal specification to that phrase, "the conference," which is inserted in the deeds of our chapels; by virtue of which the persons thus nominated possess the power of appointing preachers to those chapels. In justification of this measure, Mr. Wesley says: "Without some authentic deed, fixing the meaning of the term, the moment I died, the conference had been nothing. Therefore, any of the proprietors of the land on which our preaching-houses were built, might have seized them for their own use; and there would have been none to hinder them; for the conference would have been nobody, a mere empty name. You see, then, in all the pains I have taken about this necessary deed, I have been labouring, not for myself, (I have no interest therein,) but for the whole body of Methodists; in order to fix them upon such a foundation as is likely to stand as long as the sun and moon endure: that is, if they continue to walk by faith, and show forth their faith by their works; otherwise, I pray God to root out the memorial of them from the earth."

But as many of the preachers' names were omitted in this deed, and some of them were persons of considerable standing and influence in the connection, they took offence, remonstrated strongly, and published a spirited appeal against it, in which they represented Mr. Wesley's conduct in this affair as unjust, oppressive, and tyrannical. Some of them went so far as to declare, that he had no

more authority to settle the preaching-houses on the conference, than he had to settle the farmers' kitchens or barns, in which they occasionally preached, in a similar manner. At the ensuing conference, held in Leeds, July, 1784, this subject came under discussion. The Deed of Declaration, and the appeal, which had been published with a design of raising a party among the preachers, were read and considered. Mr. Wesley traced his power from its first rise, and calmly but firmly insisted, that he had a right to nominate the members who should form the conference, and to fix their number; and he required of those preachers who had sought to enkindle the flame of discord in the connection, to acknowledge their fault, and express their sorrow for it, or else he could have no further union with them. Mr. Fletcher, who was present, with a heart full of benevolence, entreated the brethren, who had thus offended, to make the concessions required of them; and his efforts were crowned with success. For says Mr. Benson, "Our brethren who were concerned in the appeal rejoiced our hearts by acknowledging their fault, and making submission. In consequence of their doing so, they were admitted among their brethren, and appointed to circuits."

At this conference, Mr. Benson was appointed to the Sheffield circuit; at his entrance on which he says: "I praise God, he has brought me and my family safe to Sheffield; where we find a comfortable habitation, and an affectionate people. May he bless us among them, and crown my labours, and those of my colleagues, with success."

It will be seen from some of the preceding parts of this memoir, that Mr. Benson had a strong, not to say, an inordinate, predilection in favour of our national Establishment; and though she had refused to receive him into her bosom, or to allow him to minister at her altars, yet he

very reluctantly consented to sanction any measure that would alienate the affections of the Methodists from the Church, or prevent them from attending on her ordinances. But having taken a chapel in a remote part of the town, he was induced, with the concurrence of the principal members of the society, to establish worship there during the hours appropriated for the forenoon service of the Church of England. His reasons for doing this were, "1st. As it is a considerable distance from our chapel, it will be a means of spreading the work; and, 2dly. As there are no seats to be had in the churches, nor even room for the people, and most, on that account, loiter at home on the best part of the Lord's day, it will be a place where any of our people may attend who do not go to church."

A few extracts from his journal, written during this and the following year, will serve to show the state of his mind while he continued in the Sheffield circuit. October 19th: "I gave myself up, for an hour and a half, entirely to prayer; and it was to me a remarkably blessed season. I found my soul drawn out with such desire after the favour and image of God, that my body was frequently ready to faint. O how I longed to be made holy and useful, to glorify God myself, and be an instrument in his hands of bringing others to glorify him! Over and over, with infinite sweetness, did I dedicate myself, with all I am and have, to his service."

January 30th he preached four times; and on the evening of that day he preached a funeral sermon on one who, he says, "lived unblameably, and died comfortably." The day before his death, he said to his wife, "What do you think heaven is?" She replied, "I cannot tell." To this he answered, "It must surely be love: I feel so much love to God in my heart, and such comfort in that love, that I cannot but think heaven must be of the same nature."

February 10th he says: "I have enjoyed much peace of mind these four days, and often liberty of access to God in prayer. But in and through all, I have found it a trial, especially yesterday and to-day, to be so much from my wife and children. May the Lord sanctify this trial to me, till he shall be pleased to remove it! And may he grant, if it is his will that I should thus wander about, and if he sees that I shall be more useful in this manner of life than any other, that I may never give it up to get rid of the trial!"

February 13th he again preached four times, and was graciously assisted in explaining and applying Rom. ii, 4. "Indeed," says he, "we have much cause to be thankful, that the Lord is carrying on his work rapidly among us; many being awakened, and some justified, every week. Every Sunday I have been in town, for some time, I have joined to the society four or five members, and all deeply awakened. May this blessed work go on." And in this respect the desire of his heart was granted him; for in taking an account in July of the number of members in society at Sheffield, he found an increase of two hundred persons. "Many," he observes, "have died; some are removed; and not a few have backslidden. However, blessed be God, we have a considerable increase."

This year the conference was held in London: Mr. Wesley had invited Mr. Benson to attend, but his love for quietness and retirement induced him to write a letter praying to be excused, which request was granted him; but, that the circuit might be fairly represented, Mr. Rhodes, one of his colleagues, was sent in his stead. But though he remained at home, yet he had no disposition to indulge himself in indolent repose, or to relax in his efforts for the promotion of the everlasting happiness of his fellow-creatures; for he was now, if possible, in labours more abundant.

July 24th he says: "I have been enabled to preach four times to-day, with liberty and comfort, besides reading prayers and meeting the society; and I have enjoyed peace of mind, and confidence in the Lord. After the labours of the day I visited a dying woman, and had reason to hope that she was awakened and would find mercy." September 8th he writes: "Yesterday and to-day I have given up myself chiefly to meditation and prayer, and have found my mind much humbled and much comforted. The subject of my meditation was chiefly the happiness and glory of the heavenly world, and the character and qualifications of those who shall be admitted there. O what delightful views I had of the blessed world, and how did my soul hunger and thirst after righteousness, after the image of God, the divine nature! I think I never found my soul in a happier or more serious frame, or more deeply engaged with God in prayer, that I might live more to his glory than I had ever done, and be filled with all his fulness. I trust the Lord will confirm me in a state of nearness to himself, and that I shall begin to live indeed."

October 7th: "This evening I was much refreshed, while visiting Peter Dewsbury, a young man who seems to be dying of a consumption, but in a very happy state of mind. He was the first of the family that became religious: and he was an instrument in the hands of God of turning his father and mother, and two brothers and a sister, from the error of their ways."

November 1st he says: "O how has my soul been humbled in the dust! And what great nearness have I found to the Lord in prayer, and confidence that he would hear and answer me! Indeed, I had such a view of his attributes, his wisdom, power, and goodness, that it seemed impossible that he should deny me any thing which he knew would be good for me. At the same time I could not desire any thing, but that his will might be done in

me and by me, that I might glorify him, and serve my generation."

May 26th, 1786: "I have enjoyed peace of mind these few days, and have, I hope, had a single eye to the glory of God in every thing; but yet I have not found much nearness to God, nor comfort in communion with him; chiefly, I believe, through my devoting so little time to secret devotion, and employing my thoughts too much upon the externals of my duty. O how hard I find it to attend to every part of my duty as a shepherd of a flock, and yet keep my mind free for intercourse with God!" Dissipation of mind can be prevented only by watchfulness and prayer. The heart must be kept with all diligence, and guarded by constant circumspection against the encroachments of evil. Even lawful things may be unlawfully pursued; and the solemn services of the sanctuary be allowed to engross the affections, and be rested in as the end, instead of being employed as the means of leading us up to God. We may walk about Zion, tell her towers, mark well her bulwarks, and consider her palaces; but into her courts we may seldom enter, and to the fire that burns on her altars never approach: our souls may be frigid and unfruitful, unaffected by the solemn realities which we continually urge on the attention of others. There may be a mere official piety, a mechanical performance of religious duties, and yet, while all the exterior forms of evangelical worship are preserved, the heart may remain nearly, if not wholly, destitute of the power of godliness. But against this state of formality and lukewarmness in religion, Mr. Benson was continually on his guard; and though he painfully felt a sense of his unworthiness, and was always ready to acknowledge himself an unprofitable servant, yet he continually, in a greater or less degree, maintained fellowship with God, and walked in the light of his countenance. Two years had now elapsed since he was appointed to Sheffield, and during

that period there had been a clear increase of members in that circuit of three hundred and fifty: this was a source of consolation to his own mind, and a matter for devout gratitude to God, who had caused his word to have free course and be glorified. The conference was held this year (1786) in Bristol; the same reasons that induced Mr. Benson to remain in his circuit during the sittings of the last conference, operated as powerfully upon his mind at present. "I am thankful to the Lord," he says, "that I had a good excuse for not going to conference; finding much more pleasure and profit in retirement, than in the hurry and bustle of a general meeting of the preachers." In taking an account of those who had died during the preceding year, the conference had to record the name of the venerable and sainted vicar of Madeley, who had finished his course August 14th, 1785. In answer to the question, "Who have died this year?" Mr. Wesley had simply said, in his peculiarly laconic manner, "JOHN FLETCHER, —a pattern of all holiness, scarce to be paralleled in a century."

At this conference Mr. Benson was appointed to the Hull circuit, which then included the tract of country which now forms the Hull, Beverley, Patrington, Pocklington, and Hornsea circuits. There were at that time but two itinerant preachers to visit all these places, and nine hundred members in society: now, on the same ground, there are twelve preachers, and four thousand five hundred and forty-seven members; so mightily has the word of God grown and multiplied. Mr. Benson was stationed in the Hull circuit for three years in succession; a usage, which, however common at present, was then almost wholly unknown. Mr. Wesley was in all probability induced to sanction this measure in consequence of Mr. Benson's great popularity, and extensive usefulness, in Hull. Mr. Edmondson, who was his colleague, says, "There were

several eminent ministers at Hull in those days: the principal were, the Rev. Joseph Milner, author of the 'History of the Christian Church;' the Rev. Mr. Barker; the Rev. Mr. Garwood; and the Rev. Mr. Lambert, a Dissenting minister. They were all popular preachers; but Mr. Benson's popularity far exceeded that of any other minister. All parties allowed Mr. Benson to be the ablest divine in the town. When he preached, the chapel was crowded to excess, and, by his instrumentality, many were turned from Satan unto God. His fame extended to all the neighbouring circuits, both in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire; and that person thought himself highly honoured who heard him preach. It was the general opinion that he was the greatest preacher in England: and I venture to say, he was as good, and as useful, as he was great."

In addition to this, he was engaged in superintending the erection of a new chapel in George-yard, Lowgate; and his presence could not well be dispensed with until the affairs of that chapel were completed. It was opened for divine worship, by Mr. Benson, December 23d, 1787, by a sermon which he preached from Haggai ii, 9. The attendance on this occasion was so large, that hundreds could not obtain admission. "A great solemnity," says he, "seemed to rest upon the congregation. It seems as if I had got a burden off my mind, with which it had been oppressed for weeks." The following Lord's day he preached in the same chapel, from 2 Corinthians iv, 3: "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." These sermons were subsequently published, and are now in possession of many of our readers.

But though the concerns of the new chapel engaged much of his attention, yet by redeeming time he was enabled to perfect, and prepare for the press, "A SCRIPTURAL ESSAY toward the Proof of an immortal Spirit in Man." This was designed as a refutation of Dr. Priest-

ley's system of materialism. The doctor's theory was, that man is wholly a material being; that what is called his soul, the principle of perception and thought, is not a substance distinct from the body, but merely the result of corporeal organization, and, of consequence, is extinct when the body dies. In opposition to this doctrine, Mr. Benson argues that the soul is an immaterial principle, distinct from the body, and that it shall exist in a separate state,—that it shall not sleep, or be in a state of stupor or inactivity, but be either happy or miserable:—and that the souls of the faithful are with Jesus. In proof of these positions, he argues that the doctrine of man's immortality has prevailed in all countries from time immemorial; that though there were those in our Lord's day who denied the immortality of the soul, yet that these were exceptions to the generally-received opinion, that man would survive the tomb. But he makes his appeal especially to the oracles of God, and enters largely into the Scriptural proofs of this doctrine, drawn from several passages of the Old Testament, but particularly from the testimonies of the New Testament, where life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel. Having acquainted Mr. Wesley with the outlines of his argument, he received from that venerable man this reply: "I like your thoughts upon materialism; as I doubt not I should those on the separate existence of the soul. It will be best to print at Hull or York, if you can print as cheap, and have as good paper. Should there not be a thousand copies? Then you will reserve a hundred of them for yourself." Mr. Edmondson says: "When the pamphlet on the Immateriality and Immortality of the Soul was ready for sale, Mr. Benson announced it in the pulpit, but hoped that no one, except persons of superior understandings, would purchase it, as it was rather above the capacity of common readers. This was said in great simplicity, but it produced an effect which

he had not anticipated; for nearly all his hearers purchased the work, every one thinking that he had a superior understanding. This caused a smile among a few; but all were quite sure that the author meant what he said."

The following are quotations from Mr. Benson's journal, kept during his continuance in the Hull circuit.

"September 10th, 1786. Last night and this morning I preached at Hull, and was favoured with the divine presence both times, especially in the morning, when many wept, while I was showing how we are reconciled to God by the body of Christ's flesh, offered up to God for us. In the forenoon I rode to Beverley, where I preached at noon and at night, and met all the classes. At both times the congregations were large, and much affected, especially at noon, while I explained and applied 1 Cor. iii, 11–13.

"September 23d. On Thursday night I preached at Hull. My mind has been generally kept in peace, and I have sometimes enjoyed a nearness to the Lord. But alas! I am indeed always an unprofitable servant. O that I were directed and enabled to live more to the glory of God, and to make a better use of my precious time!" Referring to a painful complaint with which he was visited, he says: "I bless God, I have found a measure of patience under the affliction; and I hope he will so sanctify it to me, as to make it a lasting blessing. In my greatest extremity, one night, when I could not get a moment's sleep, I cried unto the Lord, and he afforded me relief; and from that time I began to recover. O that I may call upon the Lord as long as I live!"

"November 20th. This evening I was happy to find notes sent up to pray for one in distress of mind, and return thanks for two that had obtained justifying faith under the word. I hope these are drops before the shower. May the Lord stir us up to pray for a revival of his work."

January 1st, 1787, in the renewal of the covenant at

Hull, he says: "The society and many others were present; and I think it was the most solemn and affecting meeting I ever attended. The Lord was remarkably present, and the whole congregation seemed to melt and bow before him in reverence, humility, and love. There was weeping on all sides, and there was also rejoicing. Many found it the most refreshing time they had ever experienced, and did, indeed, renew their covenant with God. My own soul was greatly comforted; and I trust I shall be enabled more than ever to devote myself to God's glory."

"February 2d. I spent this forenoon in reading Mr. Fletcher's Life, published by Mr. Wesley. I am very glad that Mr. Wesley has obtained so much information concerning Mr. Fletcher, and that he has furnished us with such an edifying and useful account of him. I have found my soul greatly blessed in perusing it; and indeed I have great cause to be humbled, considering how far short I am of his character, and, what is more, how little I have profited by what I have known of him, and seen in him, ever since the year 1768, in which we became acquainted with each other. O that I could now begin to follow him as he followed Christ!

"February 9th. Blessed be the Lord, I was exceedingly comforted this morning, while reading a sermon written by Mr. Walker, of Truro. I saw clearly that, through the timorousness of my temper, and the accusations of the enemy, I had frequently called the safety of my state in question, and doubted and feared without reason. I saw that I had both dishonoured God, and hurt my own soul, casting myself down, and going on heavily, when I ought to have rejoiced in the Lord. I was, and blessed be God am, firmly persuaded that I am the Lord's, his servant, and child, and an heir of his kingdom; and I can rejoice in hope of his glory.

"October 23d. Being harassed with various reasonings with respect to my want of liberty in preaching last night, and being much distressed on that account, I could not sleep till about five o'clock this morning, after which I slept about an hour, and then arose so afflicted in body, and depressed in mind, that I was fit for neither reading, nor any other means of grace. Alas! how does this reasoning disposition rob me of my peace and comfort! And surely it proceeds from pride; otherwise, why am I not as much cast down when another is straitened as when I am myself? If my concern was purely for the glory of God, and the good of souls, methinks I should be as much distressed when others want liberty, as when I want it myself. And is my reputation yet my idol? God have mercy upon me, and deliver me!" There are few ministers of the gospel who cannot sympathize with the subject of this memoir. How many have been painfully embarrassed in the pulpit; whose ideas have been thrown into the utmost confusion; whose power of utterance has been almost totally suspended; while their tongues have seemed to cleave to the roof of their mouth, and they have been ready to hide their heads, and blush for the reputation of their characters! It must be allowed, that there are seasons when the self-accusations of ministers are justly merited; when their confusion is of their own creation, and wholly attributable to themselves: when, for instance, their pulpit preparations have been neglected; when they have trusted too implicitly to their own resources, and have not sought the promised aid of the Holy Spirit; or when they have been swayed by improper motives, and loved the praise of man more than the praise of God. In such cases it cannot be matter of surprise, if they are deprived of that liberty in the pulpit with which, on former occasions, they have been graciously indulged. God frequently humbles men, by letting them eat the fruit of their doings. He

shows them their own weakness, by withdrawing his strength from them. The weapons of the gospel are "mighty," but it is only "through God." His agency alone can render these weapons effective in pulling down strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God. How far that depression of mind, resulting from embarrassment in his public work, of which Mr. Benson complains, was the offspring of pride, it would be presumptuous in us to affirm. That he watched with godly jealousy over his own heart, is evident. He often accused himself of being actuated by the most unworthy motives. After having preached at Leeds, where he went on a visit, he says: "I was far from being satisfied with my discourse. I fear I had offended God, by having it too much at heart to preach well."

This year (1789) he attended the conference, which was held in Leeds. Having to remove from Hull, he fully expected, and greatly desired, to be stationed at Manchester, where some of the principal friends had affectionately and earnestly invited him. This was known to Mr. Wesley, who offered no objection against it; but when the stations were read in the conference, Mr. Benson was greatly surprised and disappointed to find himself set down for the York circuit. His friends at Stockport, also, among whom he had laboured when that place formed a part of the Manchester circuit, greatly desired his appointment there; but he objected to go to either of these circuits, chiefly because he thought that neither of them afforded a field sufficiently large for his labours. But though Mr. Wesley refused to listen to his request, in appointing him to Manchester, yet, as he consented to go to Birmingham, he was set down as the assistant of that circuit; having for his colleagues Messrs. Snowden, Thoresby, and Smith. There were few of the preachers more

cordially esteemed by Mr. Wesley than Mr. Benson, or on whose service he set a higher value; and, as a proof of it, he generally acceded to his wishes, in reference to his appointment to certain circuits: but there were seasons when, for the general good, he deemed it right to interpose his authority, and appoint the preachers to those spheres of labour for which their talents were peculiarly adapted, and where, in all human probability, they would be most useful: and there were, unquestionably, in Mr. Wesley's mind, reasons of sufficient importance to justify him in thwarting Mr. Benson's purposes, and appointing him to the Birmingham circuit rather than to that of Stockport or Manchester.

During the sittings of the conference, he delivered an appropriate and powerful discourse to a mixed and crowded congregation of preachers and people, from Ezekiel xxxiii, 7–9: in which he showed, 1. The reason and propriety of the representation; why the ministers of the gospel are called watchmen. 2. What is especially the office and duty of ministers under this character, as here represented. 3. The consequence of neglecting, or fulfilling, their duty. He then, in the application, made a faithful and a heart-searching appeal to the wicked. "Have you taken the warning, ye fornicators, ye adulterers, ye effeminate, ye thieves, ye covetous, ye drunkards, ye revilers, ye extortioners, ye unbelievers, ye formalists, ye lukewarm professors, ye slothful, ye unregenerate, ye unholy, ye backsliders?" In reflecting on this discourse, he said, "May the Lord enable me to be what I have recommended others to be,—a faithful and diligent watchman."

August 2d, after having preached in the afternoon at Hunslet, to a large congregation in the street, he hastened to Leeds, in expectation of hearing Mr. Wesley; but finding hundreds of persons who could not gain admission into the chapel, many of whom had come from several miles

out of the country, he stood up in the open air, and preached from, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." "I trust," says he, "that the divine blessing attended the word, and that it was made an instrument of alarming and stirring up the minds of many."

The Birmingham circuit, to which Mr. Benson was this year appointed, embraced not only a large tract of country, in which several circuits are now formed, but a vast mass of population,—and a population deeply immersed in ignorance and abandoned to wickedness. Here the most savage and brutal practices, especially that of bull-baiting, were resorted to, as matters of wanton amusement. Hence Mr. Benson mentions, that after he had preached at Wednesbury, in the morning and afternoon, (and it is presumed this was on the Lord's day,) he set out for West-Bromwich; but the crowds of people that were collected together, to see a bull baited, were so great, that it was with difficulty he could pass through the street; and when he returned to Wednesbury, he says, "I found the wretched inhabitants about the same devilish sport; viz., bull-baiting. A few people, however, came to the chapel; and I found a measure of comfort in speaking to them."

March 18th, 1790, he rode to Stourport, to meet Mr. Wesley. "We found him," says he, "much stronger and better, considering that he is in his eighty-seventh year, than we expected. His sight is so defective, that he is much at a loss in giving out hymns, in reading his text, and in referring to any portion of Scripture. In conversation he seems much as usual, lively and entertaining." "The following evening," says Mr. Benson, "he preached at Birmingham to a crowded congregation, from, 'Awake, thou that sleepest, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.'" He adds: "I hope some have been profited by what they have heard. As to myself, I seldom receive any profit in such times of hurry and dissipation."

Madeley, May 26th, he says: "I rode hither to see the pious widow of my much-esteemed friend, Mr. Fletcher. I found her, if possible, more devoted to God, and filled with his love, than ever. And what a pattern for good works, and those of all kinds, done to the bodies and souls of men! What a couple were they! And how mysterious the providence that separated them! I preached in the evening in the barn she has fitted up for a preaching-house. It will hold about three hundred hearers; it was thoroughly filled, and we had a refreshing season together. The Rev. Messrs. Horne and Gilbert were with us, and Mr. Hill, a brother of Sir Richard Hill."

In the course of this year he was, on certain occasions, greatly discouraged in his work; and, at times, he had to endure much bodily affliction; when he was constrained to exclaim, "Alas! what poor creatures are we, when God lays his hand upon us! How true it is that all flesh is grass! Lord, prepare me for my latter end, and sanctify my afflictions to me." But his labours, and those of his colleagues, were crowned with the divine blessing; so that, at the close of the year, they had a clear increase to the societies, after deducting the deaths, backsliders, and removals, of one hundred and forty members.

The conference was held this year (1790) in Bristol. Mr. Wesley presided at it for the last time; but he has left no record concerning it: from the fourth of July until the twenty-ninth of August no entry is made in his Journal. Mr. Benson, however, says: "Our conference has been very peaceable; and the preachers have used much freedom, and apparent uprightness, in speaking to, and reproving, each other." The business was concluded about noon, August 4th, when the preachers took the Lord's supper together. Mr. Benson says: "I found it a profitable time: my soul was much drawn out after God, and I was favoured with great nearness to him. I gave up myself

afresh to him, and I trust that he will bless me more this year than the last. May he endow me with a larger measure of his Spirit." He was reappointed for Birmingham this year; but a few days after his return from Bristol he sustained another painful bereavement in his family. His youngest child, who had suffered extremely for many weeks, and who was reduced nearly to a skeleton, died August 13th. On this occasion he says: "I find much thankfulness to the Lord that he has released it from its misery, and taken it to himself. We have now two children, a son and a daughter, in glory. May the Lord give his grace to the four that are still graciously left us."

At the September visitation of the classes in Birmingham, for the purpose of renewing their tickets, he found, to use his own language, "reason to hope there is a very gracious work going on among the people. Many are added, and many are truly alive to God." And on September 26th he preached three times, and met all the classes, at Wednesbury and Darlaston: in both these places, he had the pleasure to find the work in a state of growing prosperity.

October 7th he writes: "I was much edified and comforted in meditating upon many passages of Scripture which prove the immortality of the soul. I think I never had so clear a view of the subject. I could have meditated the whole of the day upon it; and I regretted that I was obliged to quit it, and turn my attention to other subjects. I see more clearly than ever, that the soul only is the man; that the body is only its house, tabernacle, or clothing; and that personal identity depends on this; it being, to all appearance, impossible that he should be the same intelligent, conscious being, at the resurrection, if he had no soul, or if it died with the body. But whether the same particles of matter that compose his present body be brought together and formed into a new

body or not, yet, if the self-same conscious mind or spirit subsist, he is the same man. May the Lord strengthen my faith in that gospel which brings life and immortality to light."

October 26th he writes: "This morning I read over the first Epistle of St. John with much attention and prayer, and was edified and comforted thereby. These words in particular, 'He that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever,' were delightful to my soul. I saw and felt how inconsistent they were with the doctrine of materialism, and how certainly they implied the continued existence and immortality of the soul; it being manifestly absurd to say, that an intelligent being, such as man most certainly is, abides for ever, if he is wholly dissolved and loses his intelligent nature; nay, loses all thought and consciousness, for a long run of ages. I bless the Lord, I found a persuasion in my mind, that I did, in some measure, the will of God, and a lively hope that I should abide for ever." Soon after this he suffered much from the complaint to which he had been subject for years. "My complaint," says he, "has increased much this week. I have suffered much pain; but I have been able to preach a little, and go through the duties of my office. I have, at times, found great nearness to the Lord in prayer, especially in secret; and my mind has been drawn out to cry to him for support under this affliction, and to bless it to my profit." And subsequently he adds: "I have been so ill as not to be able to preach, either yesterday or to-day. Indeed, for some days I have hardly been able to read or write, my pain has been so great and constant; and frequently I have not been able to close my eyes all night. May the Lord, of his infinite mercy, support me under this painful and trying disorder." Toward the close of the year he had a little cessation from the severity of his pain; but though very weak, and still suffering under the chast-

ening hand of his heavenly Father, he made an effort to attend at the chapel in Cherry-street, and was enabled to assist in the devotional exercises of the watch-night. "In this," says he, "I have reason to acknowledge, that the Lord heard and answered prayer, as I was very desirous to attend, and made it matter of prayer that I might have strength for that purpose."

January 9th, 1791, he was so far recovered as to be able to preach three times; when he says, "I have been favoured with much liberty in speaking." But his pain soon returned with unusual violence, so that, January 23d, he writes: "I have been exceedingly ill for a fortnight past, hardly able to walk or stand, or even sit or lie. My pain has been for hours most excruciating. I have been sometimes racked and tortured all night without intermission, and consequently unable to close my eyes. But hitherto the Lord hath supported me. May he continue to support me; and O that he may so sanctify this painful and trying dispensation, as to make it a lasting blessing to myself and family!"

Affliction is at all times grievous; it cannot fail to be abhorrent to our feelings; all creatures shrink from the attacks of pain. Milton puts this language into the mouth of Satan: "Lives there who loves his pain?" But God can make all the pains his servants feel subservient to their spiritual interest. He doth not afflict willingly. Afflictions are not sent for his pleasure, but for our profit. There is a certain benevolent and merciful purpose to be accomplished by them. Therefore, "happy is the man whom God correcteth." Tribulation worketh patience. Mr. Benson realized the truth of this. "I bless God," says he, "I have found a measure of patience under the affliction; and I hope he will so sanctify it to me, as to make it a lasting blessing. In my greatest extremity, one night, when I could not get a moment's sleep,

I cried unto the Lord, and he afforded me relief; and from that time I began to recover. O that I may call upon the Lord as long as I live!"

February 20th he was enabled to resume his labours. "In the morning, for the first time, since I have been ill, I preached at Cherry-street, on Heb. xii, 5–14; and found it, as, I believe, most that were present did, a remarkably blessed time. In the forenoon, at Coleshill chapel, the congregation was much affected, while I explained the account given by St. Paul of his sufferings, in 2 Cor. xi, 23–31. It was indeed a precious season. In the afternoon, I preached to a large and attentive congregation."

March 2d, 1791, Mr. Wesley departed this life, aged eighty-eight years. The intelligence of this afflictive event was conveyed to Mr. Benson the following day. What the preachers generally felt on that occasion can scarcely be conceived, much less expressed. Few men that have ever lived have commanded a more extensive influence, or been more sincerely reverenced by a larger number of individuals, than the founder of Methodism. To the preachers especially he was the centre and bond of union. To his instrumentality, under God, they owed their existence as a body. He was their oracle of wisdom. To his counsels they had listened with all the simplicity and confidence of children; in his decisions they had submissively acquiesced. Where he appointed them, even when their own inclinations were thwarted, they had consented to go. But now they felt that the guide of their youth, and he whom they regarded with more than filial affection, was gone the way whence he would not return; and that they should see his face no more. Mr. Benson, on referring to this event, says: "May the Lord sanctify the stroke, and make it a blessing to the numerous societies that were in connection with him! Alas! how soon

is a life of eighty-eight years over! And how certain it is, that there is no wisdom but in living to God!"

A few days subsequently he preached at Deritend, from 2 Cor. vi, 1. "Many," says he, "were much affected under the word, especially while I intimated, that many particulars in the passage were very applicable to our departed friend and father, Mr. Wesley." The following Sunday evening he preached a sermon on the occasion; when the crowd of persons who attended was so great, that hundreds were unable to obtain admittance into the chapel. His text was 2 Kings ii, 12: "My father! my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." Though the sermon was unusually long, yet he was unable to compress into it all the matter that he desired; he therefore gave notice to the congregation, that he should resume the subject the following Lord's day; when the attendance was as numerous as before.

A few months after this he became an eye-witness of those disgraceful and destructive riots that took place in Birmingham in the year 1791, by which much property was destroyed, and many lives lost. The following is his account:—"July 15th. Yesterday, according to appointment, several gentlemen met at the hotel in this town, with a view to commemorate the French Revolution. The mob collected, and hissed them as they went in: and in the dusk of the evening, gathering together in great numbers, they broke all the windows of the hotel; and then hastening to Dr. Priestley's meeting-house, in a little time they burned it to the ground. They then proceeded to the old meeting-house, and burned it likewise. This morning they set out for Dr. Priestley's house, which is about two miles from town, and burned it also, with all the furniture. The same destructive work they have pursued all this day, having destroyed Mr. Ryland's house, and Squire Taylor's, with all the furniture. It was an awful

spectacle this evening to see from our windows the latter house all in flames.

"July 16th. All this day we have been in continual alarms. The mob reigns without control. The attack made upon them by the constables yesterday has only inflamed them the more; and this day they are continuing their depredations. Hundreds of families are removing their property, and the whole town is in utter consternation. May the Lord be our defence and habitation!

"July 17th, Sunday. A general joy has been diffused through the town this evening, by the arrival of some troops of light-horse. It has been indeed a time of uncommon trial. The whole town and neighbourhood have been in a state of alarm both night and day. But, blessed be the Lord, we have been preserved in peace. May we be more and more encouraged to trust in him, and live to his glory."

CHAPTER VI.

The first conference after Mr. Wesley's death—Different opinions concerning the future existence of Methodism—Mr. Benson is appointed to Manchester—Observations on a publication of his, entitled "Socinianism Unscriptural"—He meditates the design of writing a commentary on the New Testament—Is delivered from danger—Goes to Manchester—Disputes concerning the Lord's supper—Conference in London—Address to the societies—Mr. Benson is greatly afflicted—Democratical principles prevalent in Manchester—Dr. Tatham's sermon—Mr. Russel's pamphlet—Mr. Benson's answers to these publications—The Leeds conference—Address to the societies—Mrs. Benson in great danger—Mr. Benson's prevalent intercession on her behalf—Remarks on the abuse of power.

THE first conference after Mr. Wesley's death was held in Manchester. This formed a new era in the history of Methodism. It was a crisis of more than ordinary importance: it excited much conjecture, set conversation afloat, and induced many inquiries as to the future existence of the system. Some supposed, that the union which had hitherto existed in the body would be dissolved; that the preachers would cease to feel an interest in each other's welfare; that jealousies and dissensions would be excited among them; and that thus the flocks which they had been instrumental in gathering into one fold would be scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And with many, this was not only greatly desired, but confidently anticipated. And had Methodism been the creature of circumstances; had it been founded on the sand-banks of human authority; had its doctrines and discipline been subject to the control of carnal policy, then, indeed, the permanency of its existence would have assumed a very questionable shape. But Methodism is based on imperishable principles; it knows no change, it is subject to no mutation, and it

cannot be any thing but what it is. It has stood the test of the fiercest and foulest assailants; and could the open attacks of its most hostile and determined enemies, or the insidious endeavours of its false friends, have effected its overthrow, it had long since been brought to desolation. But though the peal of slander has been rung in the ears of the populace against it for a century, yet, like the sun in the firmament, it has held on its course, and it bids fair to shine more and more unto the perfect day.

Sunday, July 24th, Mr. Benson complied with the requests of many of the preachers who had come to Manchester to attend the conference, by preaching in the Oldham-street chapel. "I preached," says he, "from Hebrews xiii, 7: 'Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.' The congregation was exceedingly large, indeed many could not get in; and the Lord was present with us, especially during the last prayer, when the congregation was exceedingly affected."

Some of the preachers, whose names were not enrolled in the Deed of Declaration, had entertained apprehensions lest their brethren whose names were inserted in that document should deprive them of the privileges they enjoyed, or in some other way exert an undue degree of authority over them. Mr. Wesley had foreseen this; and to guard against it, he had drawn up a letter, dated 1785, which he desired might be read to the preachers at the first conference after his death; in which he says:—

"I BESEECH you, by the mercies of God, that you never avail yourselves of the Deed of Declaration to assume any superiority over your brethren; to have no respect of persons in stationing the preachers, in choosing children for Kingswood school, in disposing of the yearly contributions,

and the preachers' fund, or any other public money. But do all things with a single eye, as I have done from the beginning. Go on thus, doing all things without prejudice or partiality, and God will be with you unto the end.—JOHN WESLEY."

In conformity with the request urged in the above letter, the following records appear in the Minutes of the conference:—

"N. B. The conference have unanimously resolved, that all the preachers in full connection with them shall enjoy every privilege that the members of the conference enjoy; agreeably to the above-written letter of our venerable deceased father in the gospel.

"It may be expected, that the conference would make some observations on the death of Mr. Wesley; but they feel themselves utterly unable to express their ideas and feelings on this awful and affecting event.

"Their souls do truly mourn for their great loss; and they shall give the best proof of their veneration for the memory of their esteemed father and friend, by endeavouring, with great humility and diffidence, to follow and imitate him in doctrine, discipline, and life."

The preachers had now to perform duties to which they had been hitherto unaccustomed. The choice of a president, to conduct the business of the conference, devolved upon them. They had also to station the preachers, a work which had been previously performed, and made ready to their hands, by Mr. Wesley. And they deemed it necessary for the more effectual maintenance of the discipline of the body, to divide the kingdom into districts: and it was stated, "That the assistant of any circuit shall have authority to summon the preachers of his district, who are in full connection, on any critical case, which, according to the best of his judgment, merits such an interference;" and the preachers when assembled were

directed to choose a chairman, and their decision was to be final until the next conference. Great peace and harmony prevailed among the preachers during the transaction of the whole business. They loved as brethren, and maintained the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Their minds were too deeply impressed with their orphan-like condition, to allow any unhallowed feeling to gain the ascendency over them, or to suffer any unkind or irritating language to escape from their lips. They felt the awful responsibility of their situation: a great trust had been committed to them; and they were impressed with the conviction that they were bound by the most sacred ties to transmit to posterity, in its most unmutilated form, that system of doctrine, and code of discipline, which they had received from their founder, and which they believed harmonized with the revealed will of God; and they departed to their several circuits, with steadfast purpose of soul "to spend and to be spent for them who had not yet their Saviour known."

At this conference Mr. Benson was appointed to succeed Mr. Bradburn at Manchester, and Mr. Bradburn to take his place at Birmingham; but, instead of removing to their circuits immediately after the conference, for some reason, with which we are unacquainted, they did not change until the month of May in the following year.

Some time prior to Mr. Wesley's death, Mr. Benson had published a work which he entitled, "SOCINIANISM UNSCRIPTURAL; or, the Prophets and Apostles vindicated from the Charge of holding the Doctrine of Christ's *mere Humanity:* being the second part of a Vindication of his Divinity, inscribed to the Rev. Dr. Priestley, by the late Rev. J. Fletcher;" to which he added, "In a large detail of instances, a Demonstration of the want of Common Sense in the New Testament Writers, on the supposition of their believing and teaching the above-mentioned doc-

trine: in a series of Letters to the Rev. John Wesley." In this work Mr. Benson cites a number of texts, chiefly from the Epistles of the New Testament, in which the Lord Jesus is spoken of; and says, "Methinks every reasonable man must allow, that they are all *absurd*, and the greatest part of them even *profane*, upon the supposition that he is a mere man."

In reviewing the providential dealings of God toward him and his family, at the close of the year 1791, he thus expresses himself: "And now another year is past! Many have been the trials of this year. During the three first months of it, I was much afflicted; but the Lord delivered me, and in a measure restored me. My wife, after a confinement, was long afflicted with lameness; but the Lord has restored her: and though the children have been afflicted once and again, the Lord has restored them. Many also have been the spiritual mercies of the year. O that I may be truly thankful, and more than ever devoted to God's glory! I see that I have great cause to be humbled for my unfaithfulness to the grace of God, as well as for my many sins. May the Lord grant me true repentance and forgiveness, and graciously make me a new creature in Christ Jesus!" He then adds: "My soul was much drawn out in prayer in the morning at Cherry-street, as also at Coleshill-street in the afternoon, and the people were much affected and comforted. In the evening the society met for renewing their covenant with God. Two persons appear to have received much divine consolation."

In the early part of the year 1792 he meditated the design of writing a commentary on the New Testament; and in March he commenced the undertaking. In reference to this work he says: "The two last days I have spent chiefly in writing. I have begun a large work, which God knows whether I shall live to finish or make

any progress in. Should the notes never be published, nor answer any end to others, writing them will, at least, increase my own knowledge of the Scriptures, and be a sweet and useful employment of my leisure hours."

March 24th he had to record with thankfulness the providential care of God over him, in a deliverance from imminent danger, to which he was exposed. The horse on which he was riding into Birmingham from the country took fright, and not being able to manage it, he soon found himself under its feet, trodden upon, and dragged, either by his keeping hold of the bridle, or the stirrup. "How," says he, "I got disengaged I do not know. I was so stunned by the fall as not to be able to stand when I rose; but I was very thankful to find that I had no bones broken, and that I was only a little bruised in two or three places. But both my upper and under coat were torn to pieces. Surely this hath God wrought! By this remarkable deliverance I am laid under fresh obligations to live to the glory of my great Deliverer."

April 4th he says: "I have met with a great treasure; viz., Poole's 'Synopsis.' Not having read much in it, I never knew its value before. The small value now set upon this most invaluable and useful work, is, I think, a striking proof of the decay of real learning in the present age." On the eighth of this month he was called to experience another bereavement in his family: his youngest child was snatched away from the embraces of its fond parents after a few days' illness. On this occasion he saw the divine hand, and with perfect acquiescence was enabled to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord."

April 22d, after having preached four times, he says, "O that I may be enabled to do my duty to this people, and to watch for their souls as one that must give account! St. Chrysostom, it seems, never read Hebrews xiii, 20, 21,

without trembling; conscious of the great charge intrusted with him; and yet he was a most zealous preacher, and faithful pastor. O how much reason have I to tremble!"

May 17th, having take a solemn leave of his affectionate friends in Birmingham, he repaired to Manchester; where he met with a kind reception from the people, who assembled together to welcome him into their circuit.

July 1st he observes: "In the morning we had a very precious opportunity; and the word, I trust, was made a blessing to many. In the forenoon, at Salford, I preached on Matthew v, 20; and before I had concluded, one person cried out bitterly in anguish of spirit; and the congregation was much affected. In the evening, at Oldham-street, I preached from, 'I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God,' &c. It was indeed a very solemn time; and toward the close of the discourse a peculiar influence attended the word, and the whole congregation seemed melted down. There were people weeping on all sides; and, I doubt not, many were truly comforted. Unto thee, O Lord, be all the glory of thy own work."

For some time previously to this, many members of our societies, in different parts of the connection, had expressed a strong desire to receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper at the hands of their own preachers. They felt that they could not conscientiously neglect that divinely-instituted ordinance; and they saw no reason why those whom Christ had appointed to preach his gospel, and under whose ministry they had sat with so much delight and profit, should be prohibited from delivering to them the sacred symbols of the Lord's body and blood: especially as they believed that some of the Church ministers, in whose parishes they severally resided, were unconverted men, and notoriously immoral in their conduct; and, consequently, were wholly disqualified for preaching the

gospel and dispensing the ordinances of religion. On the other hand, there were those, especially among the senior members of the societies, who were violently set against any change being made, either in reference to preaching in church hours, or the admission of the sacraments into our chapels. Mr. Wesley's sentiments were well known: his attachment to all the ordinances of the Church was pleaded; and the introduction of the Lord's supper among our societies was regarded as an insult offered to the memory of our founder, and an innovation on the established usages of Methodism, that could not be tolerated. This difference of opinion created much uneasiness, sowed the seeds of dissension, and produced a party spirit in many societies. The Liverpool society, especially, was so greatly agitated on this subject, and the contentions among the members had become so violent, that it was deemed necessary to send a deputation of the preachers to visit them, and, if practicable, to reconcile the contending parties. July 2d Mr. Benson and five other preachers met at Liverpool; and, after much earnest and affectionate persuasion, accomplished their object, so far as to induce those who took the most active part in the disputes, if not to renounce their opinions, yet to lay aside all strife and debate, and as much as possible to be at peace one with another. Mr. Benson's remark on the subject is, "Having, by the divine blessing, been enabled to bring matters to this much-desired issue, we spent some time in prayer, and then broke up the meeting." As the preachers generally through the connection had heard of these disputes, a circular letter was addressed to them, acquainting them with their happy termination.

July 31st, 1792, the conference began in London: most of the preachers of any considerable standing and influence in the body were present. Here the subject which had agitated the connection, concerning the sacrament,

was largely and seriously discussed. Different opinions were entertained by the preachers as to the propriety of the measure; and much was said for and against it. Mr. Benson, as it may be supposed, from his strong attachment to the Church, was among the number of those who opposed the introduction of the sacrament into our chapels. He was decidedly of opinion, that if certain of the brethren had yielded a little, some very unpleasant differences, which then existed, might have been easily adjusted. At the close of this lengthened debate it was found that the names and respectability of the preachers who took opposite sides were so nearly balanced, that the conference deemed it proper, as an extraordinary case, not of morality, but of prudence, to decide it by lot. To this mode of decision Mr. Benson demurred. "I entirely," says he, "disapproved of putting the question respecting the expediency of our giving or not giving the sacrament of the Lord's supper to the lot. It did not seem to me that was, by any means, the proper method of determining the matter. And though the lot drawn was, 'You shall not give the sacrament this year,' yet I fear this will by no means satisfy those who wish to have the ordinance. May the Lord look upon us, and heal our breaches!" Before the conference closed, the following circular letter was addressed to the members of the Methodist societies:—

"To the members of our societies who desire to receive the Lord's supper from the hands of their own preachers:

"VERY DEAR BRETHREN,—The conference desires us to write to you, in their name, in the most tender and affectionate manner, and to inform you of the event of their deliberations concerning the administration of the Lord's supper.

"After debating the subject time after time, we were greatly divided in sentiment: in short, we knew not what

to do, that peace and union might be preserved. At last one of the senior brethren (Mr. Pawson) proposed that we should commit the matter to God, by putting the question to the lot,—considering that the oracles of God declare, that 'the lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.' And again, that 'the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord;' and considering also that we have the example of the apostles themselves, in a matter which we thought, all things considered, of less importance.

"We accordingly prepared the lots, and four of us prayed. God was surely present; yea, his glory filled the room. Almost all the preachers were in tears; and, as they afterward confessed, felt an undoubted assurance that God himself would decide. Mr. Adam Clarke was then called on to draw the lot; which was, 'You shall not administer the sacrament the ensuing year.' All were satisfied. All submitted. All was peace. Every countenance seemed to testify that every heart said, 'It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.' A minute was then formed, according to the previous explanation of the lots, that the sacrament should not be administered in our connection for the ensuing year, except in London. The prohibition reaches the clergy of the Church of England, as well as other brethren.

"We do assure you, dear brethren, we should have been perfectly resigned, if the lot had fallen on the other side. Yea, we should, as far as Christian prudence and expediency would have justified, have encouraged the administration of the Lord's supper by the preachers; because we had not a doubt but God was uncommonly present on the occasion, and did himself decide.

"Signed, in behalf of the conference,

"ALEXANDER MATHER, *President.*

"THOMAS COKE, *Secretary.*"

It does not become us to call in question the expediency of the measure to which the preachers resorted in determining this question. The situation in which they were placed was peculiarly critical. They dreaded a division in the societies; and they saw that much of the peace and the prosperity of the connection depended, in a secondary sense, on themselves. But they were men of God; the glory of God was the object which they uniformly desired to promote; and they sincerely and prayerfully sought the guidance of Him who hath promised, that if we acknowledge him in all our ways, he will direct our paths. And we must assume that the conclusion to which they came was, all things considered, satisfactory to the connection generally: at the same time, to an unprejudiced mind, and especially to one unacquainted with the whole circumstances of the case, it does seem strange that God should be consulted, and his special direction sought, to know whether his people should partake of the ordinance which he himself had graciously instituted.

At this conference Mr. Benson was again appointed for Manchester; and about the middle of August he resumed his labours in the circuit. But his mind was painfully exercised throughout the whole of this year. He was constitutionally inclined to look on the dark side of things. He frequently feared where no fear was; and anticipated evils which had no existence but in his own sombre imagination. The disturbed state of the connection was a source of inexpressible uneasiness to him: his own peace of mind essentially depended on the peace of the body. Every report that he heard of any agitations in the societies awakened his fears, and led him to believe that the connection was on the brink of ruin. And this state of feeling and apprehension was increased by the letters which he was in the habit of receiving almost daily, from persons who were like-minded with himself on the subject

of the sacrament. And with these letters in his hand, he often called his colleague, Mr. Adam Clarke, out of his study, and with an earnestness of manner, and a voice peculiarly his own, was wont to exclaim, "Brother Clarke, we are ruined,—we are ruined." But though his fears were excited concerning the connection, yet he pursued his work, sowing beside all waters, and diffusing the savour of the knowledge of Christ wherever he went.

October 8th he observes: "On Thursday night I met the leaders, and informed them, that, as I understood there were some individuals who were grieved at our reading the prayers at Salford chapel, we would drop reading them, unless a majority of trustees of that chapel requested us to read them; but it was a maxim with me never to contend about an indifferent thing. They seemed divided in their sentiments respecting the matter; but as a majority of them did not request a continuance of them, they drop, at least, till they do."

It should be recollected that the Articles of Pacification were not then in existence. In one of those articles, it is said, "Wherever divine service is performed in England on the Lord's day in church hours, the officiating preacher shall read either the service of the established Church, our venerable father's abridgment, or at least the lessons appointed by the calendar. But we recommend either the full service, or the abridgment."

November 4th Mr. Benson says: "I bless the Lord, I have been enabled to preach four times to-day, and at each time with much liberty. The people were much affected, especially in the forenoon at Salford, and at Oldham-street in the evening. The congregations have been very large, and I am persuaded many have been profited."

December 9th he observes: "I have had a very distressing week. I was in the most excruciating pain during the whole of last Thursday night; and being unable

to sleep as much as one minute, I rose twice, and continued for some time pouring out my soul in prayer to God, in great anguish of mind, as well as bodily pain. In the morning I was a little better, and found a degree of trust in the Lord, and peace of mind." When his pain subsided, which it did in the course of a few days, he thus expressed the grateful feelings of his heart: "O that I could be truly thankful for the Lord's loving-kindness and tender mercy, and that I may be enabled to live more to his glory!"

December 31st, after holding the watch-night, which was numerously attended, he says: "I found my mind, in some measure, thankful for all the mercies of the year, and humbled under a sense of my many failings and sins. I was assisted in preaching and praying; and have reason to believe it was a profitable time to many. O that this may be, indeed, a new year to me; a year of greater devotedness to God, and usefulness to man, than any I have ever lived!"

Mr. Benson's political principles were rigidly loyal. He cordially approved of the British constitution both in church and state; and deemed it a privilege to live under a government where liberty of conscience, the unalienable prerogative of man, was enjoyed without molestation. He feared God and the king, and meddled not with them that were given to change. But he was surrounded by men of democratical and revolutionary principles. Disaffection to government prevailed at that time to an alarming extent in Manchester. Cheap editions of Paine's "Rights of Man" were printed, and industriously and widely circulated among the labouring classes of the population. The French revolution, the murder of the king, and all the sanguinary deeds which had been recently perpetrated in that unhappy country, were regarded rather as virtues than crimes. And those who advocated the cause of good government, and

inculcated obedience to the higher powers, were considered enemies to the rights and liberties of the people. On this subject Mr. Benson says, February 3d: "A spirit of disloyalty and rebellion manifesting itself in this town, I have thought it my duty occasionally to check it, by inculcating subjection to the higher powers; and as some have termed this, preaching politics, I took occasion, from Titus iii, 1, to show, that I had done no more than was my duty; and that to preach on politics was a very different thing from a minister's inculcating a plain duty."

In Dr. Clarke's Life, reference is made to Mr. Benson; of whom it is said, that he "exhausted himself in maintaining the divine right of kings and regular governments to do what might seem right in their own eyes; the people at large having nothing to do with the laws but to obey them." And an intimation is given that Mr. Benson was one of those "political preachers who neither convert souls nor build up believers on their most holy faith." But Mr. Benson, to use the language of a well-known author, "was aware of the strenuous efforts then in progress to propagate Paine's politics with Paine's infidelity; he found disaffection to King George generally connected with an open denial of Christ and the Bible; and, like a faithful watchman, he warned the unsuspecting part of his hearers of their danger, and endeavoured to reclaim those who had been already led astray; but in doing this, he neither scattered his congregations, nor neglected to 'preach Christ crucified for the redemption of a lost world.' When he preached on the Sunday evenings in the spacious chapel in Oldham-street, he was generally attended by as many persons as could possibly press within the doors, amounting to considerably more than two thousand; and so powerful was his preaching, that these immense congregations were moved not only to tears, but to loud wailing; so that he was compelled to kneel down in the midst

of his sermons, and engage in prayer, that the people might relieve their minds by acts of devotion; when he arose and resumed his discourses."

Some time in the preceding year, Dr. Tatham, a clergyman at Oxford, had delivered a sermon in four of the churches of that city; "a sermon" said to be "suitable to the times," and which was subsequently published and widely circulated. Whether the author of this sermon intended to rouse the spirit of indignation, and enkindle the flame of persecution, in the minds of his hearers, against the Methodists, by the illiberal, abusive, and slanderous accusations brought against them, it is not for us to say; but that these effects were produced, the subsequent conduct of the populace most obviously demonstrated. For a lawless rabble of gownsmen, and others of the baser sort, such as gamesters, tinkers, and ale-sellers, armed with sticks, and spears fixed in them, assembled, obliged the preacher to leave the pulpit, overthrew the seats in the chapel, and beat and otherwise ill-treated many of the people, who were met together in a peaceable manner, in a place duly licensed, to worship God, and receive the word of Christian instruction and exhortation. This sermon of Dr. Tatham was put into Mr. Benson's hands by a friend; and having heard much of the author's great loyalty to the king, and of his strong attachment to the excellent form of government established in these kingdoms, he hoped not only to be much edified himself, by the perusal of it, but expected that it would operate as an antidote against the poisonous principles which at that time, with no little eagerness and sedulity, were so widely disseminated through the land. But, contrary to his expectation, he saw in the sermon so much of that which is illiberal in spirit, erroneous in doctrine, and abusive in language, as to be prompted to take up his pen and make remarks upon it. These remarks were subsequently published, entitled,

"A DEFENCE OF THE METHODISTS, in five Letters addressed to the Rev. Dr. Tatham." These Letters illustrate and defend some of the great leading doctrines of Christianity; and are in point of argument, purity, and strength of language, and spirited, heart-stirring appeals, inferior to nothing that the memorable author has ever published. The high estimation in which the work was held was fully evinced by the fact, that three editions were demanded by the public in a very short space of time. What the reverend gentleman, to whom they were addressed, felt on the perusal of them, we have no means of knowing: suffice it to say, that he possessed a sufficient portion of prudence to allow them to remain unnoticed and unanswered.

But though the doctor was silent, yet Mr. Benson's defence was attacked and replied to by the Rev. W. Russel, curate of Pershore, under the title of, "A few Hints for the consideration of Methodists and other Dissenters." This publication was so destitute of all argument, so fraught with low, rancorous abuse, and exhibited such gross violations of the plainest rules of the English language, as scarcely to deserve a serious answer. In one part of it, this pugnacious divine tells Mr. Benson, that had he used such language to him personally, as he had used to Dr. Tatham, "neither," says he, "your sanctity, nor even your age, would have prevented you from receiving what your behaviour would so justly merit,—'a knock-down argument,' not from my tongue, but from an instrument which, perhaps, would make a more sensible impression of its weight and power." Contemptible as this publication appeared in the judgment of discerning and seriously-minded persons, yet Mr. Benson thought it advisable to answer it. This he did in five Letters, which were published in the latter part of this year. His reasons for doing this are stated in the first of these Letters, where

he says to Mr. Russel: "The careful perusal of your 'Hints' has not caused me to alter my sentiments in any one instance. Nor would I have taken the least notice of them, had it not been for two reasons. 1st. I thought it probable that they would fall into the hands of some who, not having read my 'Defence,' or not being at the pains of comparing it with your remarks, might, from the single circumstance of their being unanswered, conclude they were a refutation of, at least, some of the doctrines I had advanced. And, 2dly. I wished for an opportunity of bringing again before the public, and of discussing more at large, two or three points, of no small moment, which in the former publication I could but just mention; and lest another opportunity of doing this should not soon occur, I think it best to embrace the present. For these reasons, sir, I again take up my pen, and shall make it my business to let nothing in your 'Hints' pass without notice, that appears to me, in any respect, to merit it. But I have too much regard for the public, and for the proper use of my own time, to reply to every thing you have thought proper to advance in your shilling pamphlet, 'the hasty composition,' as you tell us, 'of a few days.'"

These Letters, though little known by the present race of Methodists, the occasion that gave them birth having long since passed away, are yet well worthy of an attentive perusal, as there are some points of doctrine discussed in them that cannot fail to convey the most salutary and useful instruction on certain Scriptural verities of the most important nature. This work, also, had a very rapid sale; a proof sufficiently strong, that the Methodists, at least, took a deep interest in the issue of this controversy. A collection of all the sermons, essays, tracts, pamphlets, songs, and publications of different kinds, that have been circulated against the Methodists during the last century, would form a catalogue of no ordinary size, and excite a

degree of attention bordering on astonishment. Bishops, priests, deacons, Papists, Socinians, Calvinists, Antinomians, Universalists, and infidels have, each in their turn, cast a stone at them. Some have violently declaimed against their enthusiasm,—others have branded them with disloyalty,—some have cavilled with their doctrines,—others have censured their discipline,—some have deemed them hypocrites,—others have accused them as being "righteous overmuch,"—some have contented themselves with breathing out threatenings against them,—others have assailed them with rotten eggs and missiles. And to enumerate all the falsehoods and errors with which they have been charged, and all the calumnies, sarcasms, and abusive epithets that have been heaped upon them, would be a task which few would have the temerity to undertake, and fewer still the ability to perform. Certainly, in this respect, they have stood alone, as no single section of the Christian church in modern times has had to bear the load of reproach which they have been called to sustain. The reason of this we have no disposition, at present, to investigate. If the authors of these reiterated persecutions expected to arrest the progress of Methodism by them, or to silence and shame its ministers, they have been most obviously disappointed. Where, we would ask, have any of its advocates been silenced by sarcasm? When has there appeared a publication, however illiberal in its spirit, or opprobrious in its language, that has not been ably answered and triumphantly refuted? Who, that has had the confidence to attack the system of Methodism, has not retired from the contest confused and confounded? What victories have its enemies achieved by all the hostility they have evinced, and the warfare they have waged against it? Is not Methodism indebted to them, though indirectly and unintentionally, for some of the ablest and most unanswerable apologies that have appeared in its defence? Has not

persecution uniformly defeated its own object? Many of Mr. Wesley's most valuable publications would never have been called into existence, had not his enemies prompted him to vindicate his proceedings, against the slanderous accusations by which they attempted to blacken his character. Had not the poet-laureate endeavoured to stigmatize the founder of Methodism, Mr. Watson's able and triumphant defence of that venerable man would never have seen the light. And if, instead of lampooning the Methodists, Tatham and Russel had occupied their time in seeking to save souls from death, and performing the important duties of their high and holy vocation, Mr. Benson's valuable Letters, from which many have derived so much pleasure and profit, would not have appeared in print. Hence, we know not the advantages the Methodists indirectly derive from their enemies. What they intend as evil, God overrules for good; even the wrath of man is made, by his wonder-working providence, to redound to his glory and his people's profit. He turns the counsel of many an Ahithophel into foolishness. Whether Methodism would have met with such unrivalled success, and have occupied its present elevated position, had the plaudits of the world attended it, is a problem which it is utterly impossible for us to solve.

But to return from this digression to the subject of our narrative. May 20th, after preaching at Redhall and Ashton, he returned to Manchester. "I was," says he, "much affected to find the whole road crowded with drunken and idle people, who had been at the races. Notwithstanding the bloody war in which we are engaged, and the general stagnation of trade, the people are unaffected, and are as fond of their pleasures, as if all was prosperity, peace, and plenty."

May 21st he remarks: "I rode to Moseley, and preached at two, in the pretty chapel which our friends have erected

there, since I was labouring in this country twelve years ago. We had a large congregation and a refreshing time, the people in general being much affected. I then rode to Delph, where I had the happiness to see the chapel quite crowded. I was glad to find that the seed I had been enabled to sow here, twelve years ago, had taken root, and produced such a harvest." Many of the poor being in great distress for want of employment, both at Manchester and Salford, he preached a sermon on the occasion, from Micah vi, 8, in which he made a powerful appeal to the congregation on their behalf, which was followed by a collection for their relief. "I was favoured," says he, "with freedom in speaking; and while I was recommending mercy toward those in distress, many tears were shed."

The conference this year (1793) was held in Leeds. Here the subject of the sacrament of the Lord's supper was again resumed. It was found that the agitation in the connection concerning it had increased rather than subsided, during the past year. The consequence was, there was a numerical diminution in the members of society,—a circumstance that had rarely occurred at any former period. The result of the deliberations and decisions of the preachers on this subject will be seen by referring to the circular letter which the conference addressed to the members of the Methodist societies throughout England, dated Leeds, August 6th, 1793.

"Dear Brethren,—We feel it our duty to send you this address, lest the insinuations of any, who are enemies to our prosperity and unity, should grieve your minds and injure the work of God.

"Our venerable father, who has gone to his great reward, lived and died a member and a friend of the Church of England. His attachment to it was so strong and so

unshaken, that nothing but irresistible necessity induced him to deviate from it in any degree. In many instances God himself obliged him to do this: he powerfully called him forth into the streets and open fields, and afterward raised to his assistance hundreds of men who never passed through the usual forms of ordination. To all these evident providences of God, Mr. Wesley submitted, though, at first, with great reluctance. In consequence, he found himself obliged to erect chapels, which were neither consecrated according to the usual method of the Church of England, nor in the least subject to the direction of the national episcopacy. In all these things he deviated from the Establishment, merely on the ground of unavoidable necessity; or, which is the same to a truly pious soul, from the clear manifested providence and will of God.

"A dilemma or difficulty, of a similar kind, has been experienced by us since the death of Mr. Wesley. A few of our societies have repeatedly importuned us to grant them the liberty of receiving the Lord's supper from their own preachers. But desirous of adhering most strictly to the plan which Mr. Wesley laid down, we again and again denied their request. The subject, however, has now come to its crisis. We find that we have no alternative, but to comply with their requisition, or entirely to lose them! O brethren, we hate putting away! especially those who are members of the mystical body of Christ, and our dearly beloved brethren; and whose only error, where they do err, is that of the judgment, and not of the heart. And can we suffer these to forsake their faithful pastors, and possibly to run into the jaws of some ravening wolf, when the point in contest must be allowed by all to be *unessential* to salvation?

"But we are not insensible, that our brethren on the other side may justly urge, Are nor our interests as dear to you as theirs? Why then will you grieve us in so tender

a point? Why will you oppose us in those particulars which we think of very great importance to the prosperity of Zion? Why will you force upon us a term of communion to which we have never consented, or expect us to remain united to those who will be ever grieving us, by pressing the necessity of compliance with *that* which we judge to be highly injurious to the cause of God?

"Such is the dilemma, dear brethren, to which we have been reduced. We allow the full force of the arguments, which the brethren who disapprove of the administration of the Lord's supper, urge as above; nor can we, on any consideration, lay on them a new term of communion, or suffer a *single person* among them to be grieved by the reasonings of those who wish for an innovation in our plan. We therefore weighed this delicate subject with the greatest seriousness and deliberation, feeling the tenderest pity for those of our brethren who thought themselves aggrieved; and came finally to the following resolution:—'That the sacrament of the Lord's supper shall not be administered by the preachers in any part of our connection, except where the whole society is unanimous for it, and *will not be contented without it;* and even in those few exempt societies it shall be administered, as far as practicable, in the evening only, and according to the form of the Church of England.' For we could not bear that the sacrament which was instituted by our Saviour as a bond of peace and union should become a bone of contention; and are determined never to sanction the administration of that holy ordinance for the purpose of strife and division.

"You may clearly see from hence, dear brethren, that it is *the people*, in the instances referred to, who have forced us into this further deviation from our union to the Church of England. Still, we wish to be united to it as a body at large. The few societies which answer the description mentioned in the above resolution, need but have a small

influence on the whole connection. We cannot, however, we will not, part with any of our dear flock, who love God and man, on account of unessential points. For we love you all, and are the servants of you all for Jesus' sake. But we entreat our societies at large, (the few cases excepted,) to continue, as usual, in connection with the Church of England; and we shall, with great cheerfulness and contentment, labour among them according to that simple original plan of Methodism established and left to us by our venerable friend.

"We must observe to you, in conclusion, that we feel the most unfeigned loyalty to the king, and a sincere attachment to the constitution. We reverence the government; are conscious of the many blessings we enjoy under our gracious sovereign, and are thankful to God for them; and do earnestly and sincerely recommend the same principles and spirit to you.

"We remain, dear brethren,

"Your most affectionate servants,

"And faithful pastors."

The conference also deemed it expedient to address another letter to the societies, to exonerate themselves from certain false accusations which had been brought against them, and circulated through the connection by several trustees of three of our chapels in London and Bristol. The nature of their accusations will be clearly understood by the following "ADDRESS *to the Members of the Methodist Societies, from the Conference assembled at Leeds,*" dated August 8th, 1793:—

"DEAR BRETHREN,—Having received a printed letter, signed by many of the trustees of our new chapel in London, and of the Broadmead and Guinea-street chapels in Bristol, with the copy of another printed letter, addressed

to the trustees and others in the Methodist connection, and being conscious that the letter to the trustees is full of misrepresentations, injurious to the cause of God in general, and to the credit of the whole body of preachers in particular, we think ourselves bound to address you on this occasion.

"The letter above referred to accuses us of a *departure from the original plan* of Methodism. But we deny the charge in the sense intended by our accusers. We have not departed from the plan which was left us by our venerable father, Mr. Wesley, in the smallest degree, except in the few exempt cases, where the people have been *unanimous* for the Lord's supper, and *would not be contented without it;* and we were brought to the awful alternative of granting their requisition in this instance, or of losing them entirely from the connection.

"A dispensation of the gospel has been committed to us; and we have, in obedience to the call of God, dispensed the word of truth, and God has set his seal thereto. Myriads of immortal souls have been awakened and converted by our ministry. Many thousands of these are safely lodged in Abraham's bosom; and many thousands still remain under our care, in the kingdom and patience of Jesus. We cannot, therefore, sport with their salvation; we dare not throw stumbling-blocks in their way; nor can we bear to lose them, if we possibly can help it, till we present them without spot and blameless before the presence of the divine glory. But we are determined, as a body, to remain in connection with the Church of England; and again advise you to be satisfied with the simple original plan of Methodism, which has been so wonderfully blessed of the Lord.

"You have known us long, and loved and esteemed us long; and, we believe, will receive our solemn declaration as proceeding from upright hearts. And we do assure you,

that we have no desire or design of making our societies *separate churches*.

"We have never sanctioned ordination in England, either in this conference or in any other, in any degree, or even attempted to do it. The representation of us concerning this point, given in the circular letter to the trustees, is entirely false. Nor are we surprised; for many of the gentlemen who have affixed their signatures to that letter are neither members of our society, nor, in the general, attendant on our preaching. Some of them, with all their pretended zeal for the Church of England, have taken seats in Dissenting meeting-houses; and some of them professedly hold the doctrine of the salvation of devils and damned spirits. And almost all those of them who reside in London have withheld their assistance to the general cause for a twelvemonth past. They have not taken even a pew in our chapels, or contributed to the assistance of our poor superannuated preachers, who have worn themselves out in the cause of God. In short, we have reason to fear, that they intend to oppress us, till they have got all the rule and power into their hands. But the Lord reigneth; *he* is our friend, and *you* are our friends; and through grace we have felt such a union to each other, as exceeds every thing we have known before.

"The last paragraph in their letter to the trustees is *cruelty itself:* where it is intimated that some of our body are defective in loyalty. Show us the men, and the proofs of their guilt, and we will instantly cut them off from our connection, as unworthy of any office in the church of God, and as enemies to their king and country. We hold our sovereign, King George, in high estimation: we love our country, and its constitution; and as far as Christian ministers can go, consistently with their functions and the oracles of God, will support our king and country with all we are and have.

"Thus we have, beloved brethren, borne our faithful testimony against the misrepresentations and cruel falsities mentioned in the letter above referred to. We now leave the whole to you. * * * * * O bear us before the throne of God: pray much for the peace and prosperity of Zion, and for

"Your faithful pastors and affectionate brethren.

"Signed in behalf of the conference,

"JOHN PAWSON, *President*,

"THOMAS COKE, *Secretary*."

From the preceding letters, it will be seen how very difficult it was to preserve the peace of the connection, and to prevent divisions from taking place in several of the societies. A union of opinion it seemed impossible to effect; and a division of sentiment frequently creates an alienation of affection from those who differ from us. Hence parties in Christian societies are often formed. Nor can we contemplate the state of the connection at this time without perceiving with what extreme reluctance the preachers sanctioned any measures that tended in the least degree to withdraw the affections of the people from the Church. They wished to follow the footsteps of their illustrious founder. But in this dilemma what could they do? Where whole societies desired to receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper from the hands of their preachers, they felt themselves conscientiously bound to comply with their wishes. Had they acted otherwise, the probability was, that those societies would have withdrawn themselves from their communion, and entered other folds where they would have been gladly welcomed, and where all the ordinances of the gospel would have been administered to them. And we cannot conceive that there was any reason why the members of other societies, who thought differently, should have taken offence at this mea-

sure, since no attempts were made to disturb their peace, or to prevent them from receiving the ordinance of the Lord's supper in the church to which they had been accustomed to go.

Nor was this the only circumstance of a peculiarly critical nature to which the preachers were subject, in maintaining the peace of the connection. A spirit of insubordination prevailed in many of the circuits. The people refused to receive the preachers appointed to them by the conference. The ostensible reason generally urged was, a want of ministerial abilities. In one circuit, at the instance of the people's complaints, the three preachers stationed in it were summoned to London, from a neighbouring county, to be tried at a district meeting, on the ground of incompetency for the work of the ministry. One of these preachers was subsequently honoured with a doctorate, and was deemed worthy of sustaining the highest office in the Methodist connection. Soon after Mr. Benson's return from the conference to his circuit at Manchester, "being informed," as he says, "by sundry persons, that our friends at Stockport were exceedingly grieved at the appointment of preachers made by the conference for their circuit, and that they absolutely refused to receive Mr. ——, I rode there, and preached at noon and night, spending most of the intermediate time in reasoning with our principal friends, and endeavouring to persuade them, that they were mistaken in the man, and that he would probably be both very acceptable and very useful; and I had the satisfaction of seeing most of them much influenced by what I said, and inclined to retract their rash resolution, and to receive quietly the preachers sent to labour among them." He then adds, "Mr. Mayer and Mr. Lavender, junior, called upon me to-day, and informed me, that they held a leaders' meeting last night; and that they were come to the resolution to receive Mr. ——, as I had

advised them to do. I now see the hand of God in directing me to go to Stockport, as I do not think that any other person would have had such influence with the Stockport people as God gave me."

October 15th he writes: "In the morning at Oldham-street, and in the forenoon at Salford, we had refreshing seasons indeed. At the latter place I was much assisted in preaching, and my heart was very much drawn out in prayer for the people, particularly after the sermon; and while I was pleading with the Lord that he would give me all that were in the chapel, as he had given Paul all that were in the ship, the whole congregation, almost without exception, was exceedingly affected. Tears were shed in abundance on all sides; and I trust there were few, if any, present, who did not determine to be devoted to God. In the evening, I preached again at Oldham-street; and warned a very large congregation, after the example of Noah, (Heb. xi, 7,) to prepare for the saving of their souls."

January 12th, 1794, he says: "Although my wife was very poorly in the morning, and rather unwilling I should leave her, yet, as I was expected to preach at Altringham, and no person was at hand to go in my place, I endeavoured to commend her to God, and went. Upon my return I found she had been worse, and had been obliged to send for the doctor again.—13th. Last night she was so ill all night long, that I slept none. O that the Lord would appear for us, and grant us the expected deliverance! My trust is in him!—17th. After passing a most distressing night, she said to me, about four o'clock in the morning, 'I think, my dear, there is no way but one: I must die, and leave you and the sweet children.' I answered, 'My dear, let us trust in God. None ever trusted in him and were confounded. He never failed us yet. He never denied us in any thing in which we particularly

and earnestly asked his help. And I believe he will now hear us, and spare your life. I rose with a full heart, and retired into another room. I considered with myself, 'Am not I a worshipper of the true God, the God of Israel, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? And may I not expect help from him in this time of need? Did not the very heathen expect help from their false gods, and may not I look for it from the true God? Am not I a Christian? a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? And did not he do cures in the days of his flesh? and has he not given us repeated promises that he still will, if we apply to him; that he will hear and answer prayer? I then read, in the eighth of Matthew, the story of Christ's healing the centurion's servant. Afterward I turned to Hebrews xiii, and read, 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever!' 'He knows,' I thought with myself, 'that my wife is sick. He can heal her as easily as he healed the centurion's servant. But have I reason to think he will? What encouragement has he given me to expect it? or even to desire such a thing?' I then turned to the Epistle of James, and read, 'Is any sick among you, let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.' I was enabled to lay hold of this passage by faith. I kneeled down, and spread it before the Lord, in full assurance that he would make it good; and I thought, as soon as it was day I would send for two or three pious friends, and we would pray together over my afflicted wife. In the mean time, my faith was still more strengthened by reading and considering sundry other passages; as Matthew xxi, 22, 'Whatsoever things ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive;' and John xiv, 13, 14, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.' I then

read Psalm xxxiv, which was unspeakably sweet to my soul, especially the following passages: 'I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto him, and were lightened; and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. —The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.—They cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.' I now found a strong confidence that the Lord would deliver my wife, and was led to desire that he would do it this day. This I earnestly and repeatedly asked of him, with some expectation that my request would be granted. I then rose from my knees, and sat down, musing upon the passages of Scripture just mentioned. After taking a little breakfast, I went into her room. Immediately upon my entering she said, 'My dear, be not discouraged: I believe I shall be delivered soon.' I replied, 'I believe you will; for my soul has been wonderfully refreshed in praying for you.' In a few minutes she was safely delivered; and divers circumstances with regard to the help which she unexpectedly had, manifested still more the providence of God over us for good. O that we may henceforth live to his glory!"

In all ages of the world, and in instances innumerable, God has graciously granted signal answers to the prayers of his people in seasons of deep distress. And instead of trusting in an arm of flesh, and looking for deliverance from second causes, were they, in all the importunity of faithful prayer, to make their requests known unto God, the interpositions of divine Providence, on their behalf, would be much more frequent and extraordinary than

they now are. It is said of Asa, that "in his disease, he sought not unto the Lord, but to the physicians." And many imitate his example, and with no better success. "His making use of physicians was his duty; but trusting to them, and expecting that from them, which was to be had from God only, was his sin and his folly. The help of creatures must always be used with an eye to the Creator, and in dependance upon him, who makes every creature that to us which it is, and without whom the most skilful and faithful are physicians of no value. So apt are we to be looking to man more than to God for help."

The gracious deliverance which God had vouchsafed to Mr. Benson's suffering partner, in answer to his prayers, emboldened him, on other occasions, to put his trust in the Lord and expect great things at his hands. Hence, April 4th, he writes: "This afternoon, Mr. Berwick and I called upon Thomas Case, in the Infirmary, who, by a large stone, reared upon one end, falling upon him, had one of his legs dreadfully broken, and the other bruised and mangled. We found him in great pain, and yet joyfully praising God for the afflictive dispensation, being persuaded that it will work for his good. While I was praying with him, and expressing a confidence in the divine power, as being able to heal him immediately, he was filled with consolation, and broke out aloud in the strong language of praise. Among several expressions of love and gratitude to God, uttered by him, was the verse of that admirable hymn, which begins with this line,

'I'll praise my Maker while I've breath.'

Finding his pain suddenly removed, he cried out, 'Is not my leg healed?' It was not healed; but the pain was so abated, and it was so much better, that he was able to suffer its being set the next day. Blessed be God, it was a precious opportunity."

April 22d he says: "At Middleton, in the morning, we had a most refreshing season, while I proved and applied the doctrine of Christ's resurrection. My own mind was much affected, and so were the minds of the people. Tears were shed in abundance, and many were filled with strong consolation." At one o'clock and at five he preached at Rochdale, where the congregations were large and attentive. "The Lord," says he, "was with us at noon, while I explained Isaiah lxiii, 1; and in the evening, when I preached from, 'Lovest thou me?'"

At the earnest solicitation of Miss Loxdale, he went, on the 22d of May, to open a new chapel at Bilstone. He spent the afternoon of the following day with Mr. Loxdale at Bradley-Lodge. "I had," says he, "some more conversation with Miss Loxdale, who appears to be a lady of an undaunted, as well as of a most sweet, spirit, and remarkably wise and prudent. But her principal qualification seems to be her piety; her love to God, with which her heart seems to be filled." This lady, after having adorned her Christian profession for several years, became the wife of the Rev. Dr. Coke, and died at York, a happy witness of the renewing and sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost. On the 25th, Mr. Benson opened the new chapel in the morning, by preaching from Prov. xi, 30, "He that winneth souls is wise." "The congregation," he observes, "was much larger than the place would contain, and the people were much affected. I preached again in the afternoon, at two o'clock; when still more were present, and we had a precious opportunity."

At Wednesbury and Dudley the societies were greatly agitated by the contentions which existed among them, for and against the introduction of the Lord's supper; on which account the most pious and peaceable members were exceedingly grieved. In order, if possible, to allay the fierceness of these disputes, Mr. Benson took an op-

portunity of visiting them; and "I endeavoured," he says, "to call the attention of the hearers to something more important than what is at present a bone of contention among them; insisting, at Wednesbury, on faith working by love; and at Dudley, on a new creature." But though there were contentions and disputes in several societies, yet the work of God continued to prosper. After having given tickets throughout the circuit at the midsummer quarterly visitation, Mr. Benson says, "I am happy to find that the classes are, in general, very lively, and that the society is increased not less than two hundred this year."

July 8th he observes: "This evening the trustees of the Oldham-street and Salford chapels met to consider of an answer to a letter from the London and Bristol trustees. A spirit of forbearance, peace, and love prevailed among them. They were unanimous, 1st. In opposing the ordination of the preachers. 2d. In desiring the continuance of the itinerant plan. 3d. In recommending some plan to prevent the abuse of power, now in the hands of the assistant preachers, respecting the admission and exclusion of members of society, and the election and discontinuance of stewards and leaders. Many of the Salford trustees wish the Lord's supper to be administered in their chapel by the preachers, if they can have it in peace; but rather than disturb the peace of the society, they are willing to be without it."

To form plans which will effectually prevent the abuse of power in ministers, is impossible. Nothing can operate as a preventive to the abuse of anything of which we may be possessed. You can only deprive ministers of the power of admitting members into the church, and of expelling them from it, by dispossessing them of that power, and transferring it into other hands. And where there is no power of governing the church, there is no responsibility for the purity of that church. And on whom but ministers

does the government of Christian churches devolve? God forms churches by the instrumentality of his ministers. They are the organs of power in the conversion of sinners, and thus fitting them to enjoy the communion of saints; and is it reasonable to suppose that the government of the churches, which, under God, they have formed, must then be resigned into the hands of others? "Mr. Wesley, in the beginning of our system, like every other originator of a Christian community, had the sole and unrestricted power of admitting and excluding members. This, of course, cannot be denied. The preachers who form the conference are acknowledged as the successors to Mr. Wesley's power." And whatever guards may be employed to prevent the abuse of that power, still, where it exists, it may be abused; nor can all the precaution in the world prevent it.

CHAPTER VII.

The Bristol conference—Mr. Moore prohibited from preaching in The Room—Division in the society—Mr. Benson takes part with the trustees—Ebenezer chapel built—Mr. Benson's journey into Cornwall—Preaches there to immense congregations, and with singular success—The Manchester conference—Plan of Pacification formed—The Newcastle letter—Mr. Benson's answer to it—Mr. Kilham's trial and expulsion at the London conference—Formation of the New Connection—Extracts from Mr. Benson's journal—Edward Hare's character and decease—Conference held in Bristol—Mr. Benson chosen president—His letter to Mr. Dawson—Conference at Manchester—Mr. Benson declines attending it.

HITHERTO the annual conference had been held only at London and Bristol, Leeds and Manchester; and this year, (1794,) in its usual course, it met at Bristol. Here the members of the society were greatly divided in their sentiments concerning the administration of the Lord's

supper in our chapels by the preachers. The trustees of The Room, as the chapel in Broadmead was termed, and of Guinea-street chapel, were unanimously and decidedly opposed to this measure, and had previously circulated letters through the kingdom, expressive of their hostility against it, and with the obvious design of enkindling the flame of discord in the connection. But a large majority of the members in that society were of an opposite opinion, being exceedingly desirous of having the ordinances administered in their own chapels. The conference commenced its sittings, Monday, July 28th. Mr. Benson had been in Bristol several days previously, which afforded him opportunities of knowing the state and circumstances of the society. "I have been," he says, "applied to, by the trustees of the chapels here, to spend the next year in this city; and having sought direction of God, and committed the matter to him, I have consented, if the brethren in conference think it best to appoint me. I trust the Lord will dispose of me as shall be most for his glory, and the edification of his people.—August 3d. We were fully employed last week, beginning business regularly at six in the morning, immediately after preaching, and continuing, with only the intermission of one hour, till past twelve; beginning at two, and continuing till five, or some time after. The congregations have been remarkably large, and many profess to have found peace with God since the beginning of the conference. We have had blessed accounts of an enlargement of the work of God from many parts, especially from Yorkshire; and it appears, that in the course of the past year, almost ten thousand members have been added to the societies." Mr. Benson being appointed to preach before the conference, took for his text 1 Cor. xii, 25, "That there should be no schism in the body." He observes, "I found much liberty in speaking; and was enabled to lay before a very large congregation

the evil nature and the destructive effects of a division in the body of Christ. Some were very much affected, and I hope good was done." This sermon has since been printed; and while we admire the ability of the estimable author, and give him full credit for the sincerity of his opinion, and the expression of his hope that good was done, yet it is a questionable matter whether that hope was well founded. That it gratified a certain description of his hearers, whose opinions coincided with his own, cannot be doubted. But while the trustees, in whose chapel he preached, were pleased, the great bulk of his hearers were offended. The frightful picture which he drew of the sin of schism, and the pointed and severe things which he uttered against those who were guilty of this sin, excited the prejudice of many, who considered the sermon personal, and more calculated to fan the flame of discord than to extinguish it. And to his great grief, he soon found that his hopes were cut off; for, says he, "Alas! next day I found both parties were mutually opposed to each other; and that those whom the reproof and exhortation most suited, were least disposed to take them." In the early part of the conference he was appointed to the Bristol circuit; but toward the close of it, considering the critical situation in which he should be placed by such an appointment, he greatly desired to effect a change. "Seeing," says he, "no prospect of peace, I determined, if possible, to get myself appointed for another circuit. But many of the preachers had gone to their circuits; those that remained were unwilling to alter what had been done; so that the conference broke up, and I remained upon the list for Bristol." On returning to Manchester to prepare for his removal, he says, "I was in great perplexity of mind, not being able to determine whether to keep my appointment or not. Mr. Mather, Mr. Pawson, and Mr. Clarke, being with me in the coach, we had much conversation on the

subject, and they all strongly advised me to go to Bristol, as appointed."

August 30th he has this record in his journal: "Last night, at Newcastle, I had a very remarkable dream. I imagined myself to be conveyed to the brink of a very rapid river, deep and wide, down which multitudes of men and women were floating, all apparently dead, and making not the least resistance against the stream. I was exceedingly struck and concerned at the sight. Upon going a little nearer, and observing them more attentively, I perceived, I thought, symptoms of life in some of them. They lifted up their eyes, and looked at me, as if desirous I should lend them help. This encouraged me to draw a little nearer; and I thought I began to preach to them, and cry aloud, 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' While I was addressing them in this language, I observed, first one, and then another, raise themselves up in the water, and make toward land. And as I continued addressing them, I thought more and more, scores and hundreds, nay, thousands escaped to the land. When I awoke, and reflected upon my dream, I found encouragement. I thought, This river is time. Mankind are floating down the stream of it like a lifeless corpse. God has commissioned me to preach to them, and he will crown my labours with success." He then adds, "I conceived a hope too that my labours in Bristol would not be in vain."

August 24th, Mr. Pawson being at Manchester, he had a long conversation with him relative to his appointment. "He now," says Mr. Benson, "dissuades me from going to Bristol." He then adds, "To-day my mind has been much perplexed; but far beyond, and even contrary to my expectation, I was much assisted in preaching at Salford in the forenoon, and at Oldham-street in the evening. And the people were very much affected, especially in the fore-

noon, while I explained, 'Ye are not your own, but are bought with a price.' In the evening I enforced Deut. xxx, 19." But though Mr. Pawson was of opinion that he ought not to go to Bristol, yet Mr. Mather, whom he consulted, saw no reason why he should delay to fulfil his appointment: he, therefore, with Mrs. Benson and his four children, set off for that city. But, to his great astonishment, when he arrived at Gloucester, he found letters directed to him which exceedingly pained his mind, as they were all descriptive of the agitated state of the society at Bristol. But there was now no alternative: he was necessitated to go forward, and await the issue. And he soon found that a division in the society was inevitable, and that no earthly power could effect a reconciliation between the contending parties. The following circumstance had rendered even a negotiation for peace impracticable. Mr. Moore, one of Mr. Benson's colleagues, who had arrived in the circuit before him, had assisted in the administration of the Lord's supper in Portland chapel; in consequence of which he had received a legal document, in the name of the trustees, prohibiting him from preaching in The Room, and in Guinea-street chapel. Thus circumstanced, he determined to resort to no measure of resistance, nor form any plan for his future conduct, until Mr. Benson arrived in the circuit, to whose judgment he desired to pay a respectful deference. But the leaders and principal friends of the society, having heard of the lawyer's letter which he had received, came to him in a body, and requested him to go to the chapel, as if nothing had happened; and if the trustees would not permit him to preach, then they advised him to invite the congregation to go to Portland chapel, and preach to them there. With this advice he complied; and at the appointed hour of worship, he went to The Room, accompanied by the leaders, and found two of the trustees stationed in the pulpit, disposed

to offer resistance. He then read to the congregation the lawyer's letter that he had received; and told them that since he was prohibited from preaching there, he should proceed immediately to Portland chapel; when the whole congregation, with the exception of about twenty persons, simultaneously arose and followed him. Such was the state of things when Mr. Benson reached Bristol; and it must be confessed, that he was placed in a peculiarly critical position: he could occupy no neutral ground; he was obliged to make a choice, either to support his colleague, and consider the insult that had been offered to him as offered to himself, and refuse to preach in those chapels from which he had been arbitrarily expelled; or else sanction the measure to which the trustees had resorted, and, by occupying their chapels, tacitly justify their proceedings against Mr. Moore. And, for reasons which we assume were satisfactory to his own mind, he chose the latter, in conjunction with Messrs. Rodda and Vasey, two of his colleagues, who were like-minded with himself. It is difficult, if not impossible, for us, living at this distance of time, and unacquainted, as we necessarily are, with the circumstances of the whole case, to determine accurately how far Mr. Benson's conduct was consistent with the duty which he owed to his colleague, in thus occupying chapels in which he had an equal right with himself to preach, but against whom legal proceedings had been instituted. If Mr. Moore had violated any rules of the connection, by assisting in giving the sacrament to the society, he might have been called to an account at a district meeting for his irregular proceedings, and been dealt with accordingly. Methodism makes provision, in its Rules and Usages, for punishing any delinquencies of which its ministers may be guilty; and to these Mr. Moore was amenable, and by them he ought to have been tried: but no such process had been instituted against him; and when trustees under-

take to expel a man from chapels erected by the connection, and for the sole use of preachers appointed by the conference, they usurp a degree of authority which no arguments or reasons can justify. A division was now made, not only among the preachers, but in the society: about two hundred members remained with Mr. Benson, and thirteen hundred attached themselves to Mr. Moore. Every thing was subsequently done, that seemed at all likely to effect a reconciliation between the parties. A district meeting was held, and several of the senior and most influential men in the connection, who were not members of the district, attended, at the request of the chairman, to aid them by their counsels; but after some days spent in attempting to make an amicable adjustment of this unpleasant affair, they had the mortification to find themselves not a single step in advance toward this desirable end. And they had to break up the meeting, and go to their several appointments, full of apprehensions lest this division should be a prelude to a wider and more alarming schism in the body.

The circuit was now divided. Mr. Benson and his two colleagues had to exercise their ministry in The Room, Guinea-street, and Keynsham chapels: into no others could they gain admittance. And Mr. Moore, with Messrs. Rutherford, Crowther, and Grant, who were called to his assistance, had the other parts of the circuit, which then included the several places which now form the Bristol, (South,) Kingswood, and Downend circuits, under their care. To supply the place of The Room, a most eligible piece of land was immediately purchased by the society, about two or three hundred yards distant, and the erection of a new chapel commenced, of double the dimensions of that where they had been accustomed to worship, and of which they had been deprived; and in the course of six months it was finished and opened, and a much larger

congregation than could possibly be contained in The Room was soon collected. Mr. Bradburn, the chairman of the district, came from Bath to assist at the opening service; and preached from the fourth chapter of Nehemiah, concerning the wrath of Sanballat, who said, "What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" This sermon served to widen the breach, rather than to close it; as the preacher delivered his sentiments concerning those who differed from him too plainly to be misunderstood. A circumstantial account of all the occurrences of this year, between the two parties, could they now be furnished, would promote neither the reader's pleasure nor profit. Could he be put into the possession of all the letters that were circulated, the pamphlets that were written, and the litigations that were maintained, during the year, they would only serve to awaken regrets, that even good men should so far forget their high and holy calling as to impute motives, and apply language to each other, so alien from that charity that thinketh no evil.

A few extracts from Mr. Benson's journal, written at different times during this year, are here subjoined. "September 14th. My time has been taken up the three last days in writing letters. But I have preached almost every evening either at The Room or at Guinea-street; but alas! not to such congregations as we should have had, if this division had not taken place.—October 12th. Much of my time, last week, was employed in meeting classes; and I had the satisfaction of finding, that God has strangely overruled the division to the stirring of many of the people up, and bringing them into more intimate communion with himself." Having dined and spent the evening with Dr. ——, he says: "He presses my applying for orders in

the Church, and says he will assure my success. But I do not yet see my way clear. And yet, if our disputes are not settled, and our breaches healed, in some way likely to promise tranquillity, I had better be anywhere than in the Methodist connection.—November 23d. This morning I had a precious time at The Room, while I explained the former part of the seventy-eighth Psalm. In the evening, also, at Guinea-street, I found liberty in explaining, to a pretty good congregation, 'Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid.' I thank the Lord, that I enjoy a measure of inward peace amidst our outward trials; and I trust God will bring good out of the great evil of division. January 1st. 1795. I have endeavoured to begin the year by a solemn act of dedication of myself to God; and I trust I have done it, in some measure. This evening I endeavoured to improve the season for the good of the congregation, and to exhort all present, by the mercies of God, to present themselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. I trust many do, and will comply with the exhortation. February 21st. Mr. Bradburn, Mr. Moore, and I met at Kingswood this forenoon, at eleven o'clock, and had much conversation together. We agreed upon a letter to the preachers, containing general outlines of a plan on which, it appeared to us, all parties might unite, and by means of which a division of the Methodist body might be prevented. This was the same in substance that I had previously drawn up." Mr. Bradburn remarks, in his journal, concerning this meeting: "This day I went to Kingswood, and returned. My design was to make peace, if possible; and I succeeded in a good degree." April 5th, Dr. Coke and Mr. Moore breakfasted with Mr. Benson, and had a long conversation on the present aspect and affairs of Methodism. "I see," says he, "no immediate prospect of a reconciliation at Bristol; but I trust a general division will be

prevented.—March 14th. This week has been chiefly employed in writing letters. It grieves me exceedingly that so much of my time has been taken up, and is likely to be taken up, about these unprofitable disputes. O that God may put an end to them, and reconcile us all in love!—March 21st. This week I have been employed pretty much in meeting classes. The rest of my time has been occupied, chiefly, in drawing up a general plan of pacification, which I have transcribed, and sent to Mr. Mather, to be laid before the Manchester and Stockport trustees; and to be copied and sent to Leeds, Sheffield, and Hull. I trust it will meet with acceptance in general, and that a reunion will yet take place among us.—April 1st. To-day the committee met at Kingswood to settle the accounts of the quarter. We had Mr. Bradburn and Mr. Moore with us; and I read to them the plan of general pacification which I had drawn up. They agreed to it, with few exceptions; and if Mr. Mather, Mr. Thompson, and Mr. Pawson agree to it, they are willing that it should be printed with their names annexed. We had a friendly meeting; and I trust that peace and unanimity will return."

The above extracts are sufficient to show how greatly Mr. Benson desired to promote the peace, and preserve, if possible, the union, of the connection. He was heartily tired of dissension, and the circumstances in which he was placed were peculiarly painful to him. He had been accustomed, in every circuit where he had laboured, to command large congregations; but so great was the prejudice excited against the cause which he had espoused in Bristol, that his congregations, even on a Sunday evening, were not larger than those which attended on the ministry of Mr. Moore and his colleagues at five o'clock on a week-day morning. Toward the latter end of May, Messrs. Mather and Pawson addressed a letter to the Bristol society on the subject of peace; and both parties, being

equally desirous of laying aside their weapons of warfare and terminating their disputations, agreed to set apart the 26th of June as a day of fasting and prayer, that God would be pleased to interpose on their behalf, and cause the waves of contention to subside, and the strife of tongues to cease. Mr. Benson, being about to pay a visit to the societies in Cornwall, preached on June 1st, from, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." "I was," says he, "much assisted in preaching, and the divine presence was among the people. Afterward I met the society, and read Messrs. Mather's and Pawson's letter, and spoke a little on the subject of peace. Most of all present were exceedingly affected; and they united in prayer, that the Lord would be with me on my intended journey."

June 2d, Mr. Benson set out with Mr. Stock, in a single-horse chaise, for the west. They arrived at Taunton in sufficient time for Mr. Benson to preach at seven in the evening. For several succeeding days he preached at Collumpton, Exeter, Launceston, St. Austell, and Truro. In all these places the congregations were large and attentive; and many of the people were much affected, and proved that they did not hear in vain. June 9th he says: "Never did I see a place so crowded, and never did I see a congregation more affected than at Redruth to-night, while I discoursed on, 'Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?' We were informed of several who were awakened, and of some that were justified. Many hundreds continued in prayer a great part of the night."

"June 10th. The chapel being too small to hold a fourth part of the congregation at Tuckingmill, I stood up in a field behind a house, having a wall and a bank behind, and on one side, on which some hundreds placed themselves, and the bulk of the congregation before me, con-

sisting, I should think, of about five thousand. After singing and prayer, I took for my text 1 Tim. i, 15. I had not spoken long before such ideas were presented to my mind, and words given me, that many were cut to the heart on all sides. Numbers were in tears, and many cried out in distress in different parts of the congregation. I continued speaking till I could speak no more. But I observed, before I concluded, that any who were in distress might retire into the chapel, and that some of our friends would pray with them. I then gave out a hymn and prayed. One woman came up to me, before I got off the table, and, with streaming eyes and a heart full of gratitude and love, declared what God had done for her soul. As soon as I had dismissed the congregation, numbers thronged into the chapel; and a gentleman's steward, who had been much affected under the sermon, was one of the first who fell down upon his knees, before all present, and cried, 'Lord, humble my pride! Lord, convert my soul! O, let thy work in me be deep; and let me not turn back again!' Many now cried out in distress; and the leaders, local preachers, and others, continued in prayer with them most of the night. As I was quite exhausted, I returned in a chaise to Redruth with Mr. Stock. The next morning I was informed, that near twenty in all were brought that night to taste that the Lord is gracious; and many of our friends were of opinion that not fewer than one hundred were awakened under the sermon. Unto God be all the glory.

"June 11th. In the forenoon I set out, in company with several friends, for the copper-works at Hayle, where notice had been given for me to preach at twelve o'clock. The chapel was much crowded, and several were affected, while I enforced, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Immediately after we went to St. Ives, where we expected to dine. In the evening, the chapel, which will hold one

thousand five hundred, was crowded; and I was assisted in explaining and enforcing Luke xv, 7. The congregation was serious and attentive, but not so susceptible of good impressions as that I had addressed the preceding night." June 12th, having exerted himself so much beyond his strength the two preceding days, he was so hoarse and otherwise indisposed, that he was scarcely audible at Penzance in the evening.

June 13th, in company with his friend Stock, he went to see the Land's End; from the last rock of which he looked toward the sea, as if, to use his own words, he "had been looking over time into eternity." He then proceeded to St. Just, where he arrived in time for dinner. At seven in the evening he had a most crowded congregation; and many were much affected, especially while he reminded them that they were come almost to the land's end of life, and inquired whether they had come to the end of their sins, and whether they were determined to go into the wide ocean of eternal misery. Afterward he returned to Penzance.

June 14th he preached at Penzance in the morning: the chapel was excessively crowded, and the word was accompanied with power to the hearts of many. At two o'clock he preached at Mousehole: he was grieved that he had not preached abroad, as many hundreds who had come to hear him could not get into the chapel. In the evening he preached again at Penzance: as the chapel could not hold one-third of the people who came to hear, he stood up in the market-place, and addressed about six thousand people on the awful subject of "a judgment to come." "Many genteel people," says he, "and some officers and soldiers, stayed all the time, and heard with great attention. Indeed, the whole of the congregation was as quiet and silent as if in a church or chapel; and the word delivered seemed to produce a blessed effect on

the multitude." June 16th he preached abroad at a little distance from Penzance, to an attentive audience, on the necessity of receiving the Holy Ghost, in order to their being either wise, or holy, or happy. "The word," he remarks, "seemed to fall like dew, or rain upon the mown grass."

After the conclusion of the service, accompanied by several affectionate friends, he proceeded to Helstone, where, without his knowledge, it had been published for him to preach in the street. "I fear," says he, "it was a lost opportunity; for although many attended, such were the noise and carelessness of those at a distance, as to prevent that solemnity and seriousness with which the discourse would have been heard, had it been delivered in a chapel, or any quiet place." Fearing that the serious part of his hearers had not been much profited, he preached the following morning, at seven o'clock, in the chapel. He then hastened to Tuckingmill, where it was published for him to preach at noon. "As I felt myself," says he, "very weak, and had hardly any voice, and as the preaching was to be at such an inconvenient hour, I was in hopes there would be no more people than the chapel would contain. But before we came within two miles of the place, these hopes were cut off; for people were coming from all parts in such crowds, that it evidently appeared that several thousands would soon be assembled. And when we came within sight of the ground, I was utterly astonished to see not less, I believe, than eight or ten thousand people collected. Indeed, one of our friends, who has since measured the ground on which they stood, computes that there were, at least, ten thousand eight hundred persons present on the occasion.

"My heart sunk within me at the sight of them, because I did not think it possible to make them hear, and that I seemed to have nothing to set before them. I would have

persuaded one of the preachers to stand up in my place, but could not prevail. I at length stood up; and, after giving out a hymn, begged the divine blessing on my five barley-loaves and two small fishes. I then began to address the multitude in the language of our Lord, John vii, 37: 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.' The Lord was pleased to multiply the spiritual food in the distribution; and there was, I believe, enough for all, and to spare. Many were affected under several parts of the discourse, and wept much; and I was enabled so to speak as to be heard by most, if not all, that were present.

"After dinner we hastened on to Gwennap. There, at seven o'clock, I found a congregation as large, or larger, than we had at Tuckingmill. And while I explained and applied, 'By grace are ye saved through faith,' and offered a *full* and *free* salvation to the most guilty and the most vile, many on all sides felt the power of the word; and while hundreds, and even thousands, wept for *joy* or *sorrow*, some cried out in a manner that would have pierced a heart of stone. I spoke till the night came on, and I was quite exhausted. I then dismissed the congregation; but, instead of going away, as many as could immediately crowded into the chapel, where several of our brethren joined in prayer with such as were in distress. About half an hour after, we heard that many of them had found peace with God, through faith in Christ; and of many more the next morning." June 18th he preached at Penryn; and in the morning of June 19th, accompanied by Mr. Stock, he went to Falmouth. "We spent," says he, "a part of the afternoon in viewing the fort; an amazingly strong place, situated on the top of a high rock, which overlooks the sea, and the entrance of the harbour, as also the town. I was much delighted with the pleasant situation of a part of the town, and with the delightful country

round about. In the evening, we had our large and commodious chapel, the largest and best in Cornwall, exceedingly crowded; and I was much assisted in explaining and applying to Calvinists and Arminians, to ministers and people, 1 Cor. iii, 11: 'Other foundation can no man lay than is laid, which is Jesus Christ.' The whole congregation was as silent as death, and many seemed to feel the power of the word."

June 20th, in the forenoon, he returned to Redruth. Not having recovered his voice, he wished to preach in the chapel; but this he soon found to be impossible; for immediately after he entered it, numbers began to crowd in, so that the women, children, and such as were low of stature, began to be trodden under foot, and to shriek aloud. An attempt was made by two gentlemen to prevail upon the people to enter the chapel gradually, but in vain. "One might," says Mr. Benson, "as well attempt to stop the flowing of the tide. To prevent the loss of lives, I got up upon a window, and cried aloud, that I would come and preach without. And it was well I did, as the chapel would not have held one-third of the people; the whole of whom heard with amazing attention and seriousness."

June 21st he went on to St. Agnes, where he found that no more than about a sixth part of the people assembled could possibly get into the chapel: he therefore stood up in the street, and explained to a listening and deeply serious congregation, consisting of about five thousand, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." "I found," he says, "much comfort and enlargement in speaking; and many wept profusely under the word. I spoke about an hour and a half; and, blessed be God, was not hurt." Having returned to Redruth, in the afternoon, he stood up at the end of the market-house; when he observes, "I was presented with such a sight as I never saw before. The

whole street before me, as far almost as I could see, and all the alleys and houses on each side the street behind, on both sides of the market-house, and the market-house above and below, were all crowded with people as thick as they could stand. Some of our friends calculated them at fifteen thousand. I think there could not be much less. They were all as silent and serious as night, while I explained Daniel v, 27. I continued preaching and praying from two till four o'clock. Many, I believe, felt the power of the word. Soon after I began, a post-chaise with company came; but being unable to get through the crowd, they were obliged to *unyoke* the horses, and stay till all was over.

"We had hardly time to take a cup of tea before it was time to go to the PIT, a kind of amphitheatre, where notice was given of my preaching at half-past five. When I arrived at the place, and with much difficulty had got to the brow of that side of the hill, below which I was to stand, I was astonished at the amazing concourse of people assembled. Such a multitude I had never seen together before. It is supposed there were no fewer than twenty thousand. Although I was within a few yards of the place where our friends had fixed for me to stand, and although several assisted me to the utmost of their power, I could not get a step nearer to it. Finding it in vain to try any longer to get forward, I made two or three struggles, and got out of the crowd, purposing to stand in some other place, if a way were not made for me. At length a captain of one of the mines found means to make a kind of entrance, and I at last got to the place. Standing upon a table, I had a full view of the immense multitude, and had the satisfaction to find that I could make them all hear. After a solemn hymn on death, and judgment, and prayer, I named Rev. xx, 12, 'I saw the dead small and great stand before God,' &c., as the subject of my discourse. I

bless the Lord, I was endowed with courage, and favoured with liberty in speaking. The divine power accompanied the word; and many, on all sides of the congregation, even on that side opposite, and most remote, were much affected. Having reason to believe that many hundreds were under good impressions, and fearing they might be transient, to prevent this, I gave notice that I should preach next day in the chapel at Redruth, on the parable of the sower." And in the morning at seven o'clock the chapel was crowded; and while he showed how the different kinds of ground, mentioned by our Lord, illustrated the different sorts of hearers of the gospel, many were deeply affected. Under this sermon one person entered into the glorious liberty of the children of God, and six were awakened from the lethargy of sin. In the evening he preached at Truro, to a congregation consisting of some thousands of people, in a field near the chapel.

The three following days he preached at St. Austell, Bodmin, and Camelford. He then, in company with Mr. Mabyn, set out for Liskeard, taking a guide with them, as he purposed passing over the Moors: they soon entered upon them, and for about twelve miles saw little or no cultivated ground. "We passed," he remarks, "between several high mountains, formed of mere rocks, piled one above another; which mountains seemed evidently to have been formed by the flood, and to have remained from that time; for while the water washed down the soft earth, on all sides, it could not wash down these rocks, but left them lying one above another, in that tremendous and awkward state in which they appear. I was glad to find that there are many other proofs of the flood in this country. Mr. Mitchell, of Gwennap, told me he had discovered, in digging below the sea, (which is often done in Cornwall,) a human skull, fifteen feet beneath low water; and that different kinds of ore are generally found under the sea, and

in the low valleys, washed down from the higher grounds where these sundry kinds are found in the mines; which could only have been done at the time of the general deluge."

Mr. Benson arrived at Liskeard in sufficient time to preach. But there he had the mortification to find a congregation of a very different description from those which he had recently addressed. "Such a wild, and apparently stupid, congregation," says he, "I have rarely seen anywhere, and certainly not in Cornwall. I endeavoured, I fear to little purpose, to alarm them, by explaining and applying, 'How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?'" Having preached at several other places, he, with his friend Stock, arrived in Bristol July 3d. Finding Mrs. Benson and his family well, on his return home, he joyfully praised the God of all his mercies.

This must be regarded as a most extraordinary and memorable journey, whether considered as an exhibition of physical strength, or a zealous and almost unparalleled effort to promote the salvation of the souls of men. In the course of a single month Mr. Benson travelled about four hundred miles, chiefly in a gig, preached forty sermons, and, on a very moderate computation, to at least sixty thousand people. And his preaching bore no resemblance to the things of which the poet speaks,

> "That mount the rostrum with a skip,
> And then skip down again; pronounce a text;
> Cry—hem; and reading what they never wrote,
> Just fifteen minutes, huddle up their work,
> And with a well-bred whisper close the scene."

No, his sermons were more than ordinarily long,—seldom short of an hour; and sometimes he was so thoroughly absorbed in his subject, as to forget himself, and the entire exhaustion of his physical powers rendered an almost abrupt conclusion necessary. And during the whole course of his long and laborious ministry, never was he placed in

circumstances more calculated to call forth the native energy of his mind, and to excite the zealous effusions of his heart, than when addressing his Cornish congregations. He had been shut up for several months previously in Bristol, harassed and disturbed by dissensions and litigations; having small congregations to preach to, and they chiefly composed of the same persons; but he had now met with a people prepared of the Lord, whose hearts were ready to receive the good seed, the engrafted word which was able to save their souls. Never did the parched earth more readily drink in the teeming shower, than they did the impressive and consoling truths of the everlasting gospel. Nor were Mr. Benson's labours ever more signally or successfully sanctioned by God, than during his month's ministry in Cornwall. To calculate accurately the full amount of moral good effected by his preaching at this period, is impossible. Never will it be fully known until the day of judgment reveal it. Many who were then converted from the error of their ways, and brought to a knowledge of the truth, have since fallen asleep; and though nearly a half century has rolled away since that time, yet some remain until this day who have a vivid recollection of the gracious visitation with which they were then favoured, and who speak of it in terms of the liveliest gratitude.

Soon after Mr. Benson's return from his Cornish tour, he had to set off for Manchester, where the conference was this year held. Considering the different opinions entertained by many influential members of the societies, on the subject of Methodist discipline or church government, and the appeals that were expected to be made to the preachers to subject it to certain changes or modifications, apprehensions were seriously entertained that a division in the body must inevitably ensue. The circular letter which the conference, at the close of their

sittings, deemed it their duty to address to the members of the societies throughout the kingdom, will sufficiently illustrate the nature of their proceedings, in order to lay a firm and lasting foundation for the peace and harmony of the connection:—

"DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN,—We beg leave to state to you what has been done in our present conference, in order to establish a general and lasting peace and union throughout the connection.

"When we assembled together, our hearts were most deeply touched with the awful situation of our affairs. We trembled at the thought of a division, and its dreadful consequences; and therefore determined to set apart the first day of the conference as a day of solemn and real fasting and prayer. God was indeed in the midst of us; and we all felt a confidence, that a solid foundation would be laid for lasting peace and unity.

"When we met in conference on the second day, we saw the necessity of appointing a committee to prepare a plan of general pacification; and that the committee might be men of our own choice, in the fullest sense of the words, we resolved that they should be chosen by ballot. Every preacher, therefore, in full connection, gave in nine papers, with a name upon each (nine being the predetermined number of the committee.) The ballots were received, and Messrs. Mather and Pawson were desired to retire, and count the votes. When they returned, they gave in the following names, as the first upon the list; viz., Joseph Bradford, who was the president, John Pawson, Alexander Mather, Thomas Coke, William Thompson, Samuel Bradburn, Joseph Benson, Henry Moore, and Adam Clarke. We were astonished at the choice, and clearly saw it was of God. It evidenced, beyond a doubt, the impartiality of the body of preachers: for there must

have existed a majority, on one side or the other, in respect to the disputed points; and yet they voted for a mixed committee. The committee accordingly met six evenings successively; and sat each evening, after all the fatigues of the conference, for about three hours and a half. Their plan was at last completed, and laid before the conference; who, with the alteration of a single article, passed them unanimously. After this, two or three articles more were agreed upon, under the title of *Addenda*, in order to give complete satisfaction, and to remove every obstacle to a lasting peace."

The following memoranda are taken from Mr. Bradburn's journal, concerning the proceedings of this conference:—"Hitherto every thing in our meetings is very promising, and will, I believe, turn out well. The prayers of so many cannot fall to the ground. O my God, I bless thee for the spirit I have felt ever since we met. Thou rememberest how I sought thee in secret, and in great distress. O bless me always with this precious love!" He then adds, in the beginning of August: "Conference continued,—very fatiguing, but very pleasing work. Surely I feel the blessing of being a peace-maker.—Conference ended. All well! Eternal glory be unto thee, O God." The sermons that were preached on this occasion greatly tended to conciliate the affections of the preachers, and encouraged them to believe that God would unite them together as the heart of one man. Mr. Benson says: "I was graciously assisted in preaching before the conference, to an immense congregation, in the forenoon, in Oldham-street, on Ephesians iv, 3: 'Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' All were very attentive, and the generality of the people deeply affected sundry times during the discourse. I believe it had, and will have, a good effect, and that the minds of both preach-

ers and people will be disposed to peace and unity." And Mr. Bradburn delivered a very effective discourse in the same chapel, a few days subsequently, from Judges xiii, 23: "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt-offering and a meat-offering at our hands, neither would he have showed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these."

The articles of agreement for general pacification, which were then drawn up, are so well known, and so invariably acted upon, in maintaining the discipline of the connection, that it is unnecessary to insert them here. Let it suffice to say, that the delegated trustees, who had assembled at Manchester, to urge their claims on the attention of the conference, were so perfectly satisfied with what the preachers had done to meet their views, that they unanimously sent a vote of thanks "to the president and members of the conference, for their kind attention to the business of the delegation of the trustees that has been laid before them."

The union which was then effected was acknowledged to be of God. The preachers determined to let all resentment be buried in eternal oblivion, and to banish contention and strife from among them; and they said to the people, "O brethren, be as zealous for peace and unity, in your respective societies, as your preachers have been in this blessed conference. Let the majorities and minorities, on both sides, exercise the utmost forbearance toward each other; let them mutually concede one to the other, as far as possible; and by thus bearing each other's burdens, fulfil the law of Christ. Surely our present complete and happy union, so contrary to the fears of many, is a signal of good times. God will, we believe, pour out his Spirit upon us more largely than ever; and, by the exercise of his most gracious prerogative, bring abundance

of good out of all our past evils. It cannot be supposed that the difference of opinion which had previously existed among the preachers was entirely forgotten, or materially changed; but it was so far neutralized by the hallowing principle of brotherly love, that they departed from each other, to their several stations, with a full determination to bend all their efforts to the promotion of Scriptural holiness, without which no man can see the Lord. Even in Bristol itself, where the society had been so greatly agitated and divided, it was pleasing to observe, after the close of the conference, that there was a change of pulpits between Messrs. Benson and Moore; the latter of whom preached in the Old Room, and the former occupied Portland chapel, which was exceedingly crowded, while he was enabled, with clearness and power, to preach from 2 Corinthians ii, 15: "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish."

November 9th Mr. Benson took his leave of a very crowded and deeply affected congregation, by preaching from 1 John i, 3, 4. "The Lord," says he, "was with us of a truth; and the word, I trust, had free course. I thank God, the end for which I came to Bristol is, in a great degree, answered. The breach is healed, and two chapels, with about three hundred people, are preserved to the connection." On his way to Leeds, his new circuit, he preached at Gloucester, Worcester, Birmingham, Derby, and Sheffield. In the latter place he spent two or three days. November 15th he says: "This day I have been enabled to preach three times to very large congregations. In the morning at seven the chapel in Norfolk-street was as much crowded as though it had been a Sunday evening. That in Garden-street was equally crowded at half past ten; and in the evening, at Norfolk-street, many who came to hear could not get into the chapel. I bless the Lord, I have been much assisted every time; and we have had

precious opportunities." On his arrival in Leeds he thus expresses himself: "Thanks be to God for his care and kindness, and for giving his angels charge concerning us, through the whole of our long journey. We got to our journey's end in health and safety this day; and, to our comfort, found a servant in the house, and every thing provided for us. We have met with a hearty welcome indeed from our friends, both relations and others, who have expressed great joy at our arrival. I pray God it may be for the good of many souls, as well as for our own edification and comfort."

January 1st, 1796, he says: "Blessed be the Lord, who has brought me and my family to the beginning of another year." He had preached at Armley the preceding evening, at six o'clock, and then hastened to Leeds, where he began the watch-night by preaching at half past eight. "Having," says he, "praised God for the mercies of the past year, and cried to him for the pardon of the sins of it; and having offered ourselves afresh to God, we retired to rest, that we might be prepared for the duties of the day."

But though the preachers at their late conference were knit together as the heart of one man, and mutually solicitous to promote, as far as possible, the unity of the body, yet some of the people, actuated by a factious spirit, sought, in the early part of this year, to disturb the peace of the connection, by the publication of a circular letter, addressed to all the stewards and leaders throughout the kingdom. And one night, about half past ten o'clock, on Mr. Benson's returning from one of his country places, he was surprised to find the leaders, local preachers, and stewards holding a meeting in the chapel. "But I soon found," says he, "that they were met to consider whether they should co-operate with some leaders in the north, who have published a letter on the subject of altering our plan of governing our societies, and putting the power everywhere into

the hands of the leaders and people." With the authors of this letter he was intimately acquainted; but, to use his own language, "Amicus Socrates, amicus Plato; magis amica veritas," he determined to answer it. A part of his reply to this letter we here subjoin:—

"My Dear Brethren,—I was sorry to have a printed letter put into my hands signed by your names. I have known many of you for upward of twenty years, and, with some of you, have long been in habits of great intimacy. The chairman of your meeting, in particular, has been one of the most intimate friends I have had ever since I was first in the Newcastle circuit, which was in the year 1772. And I am grieved that you should have a hand in any thing that seems calculated to stir up strife among us, or to prove to any an occasion of falling. This, I am persuaded, you do not intend. I know most of you so well, that I give you full credit for what you assert, respecting the *uprightness* of your intentions. But some of you have lived long enough in the world to have learned that, with the best intentions, we may inadvertently give occasion to much evil. With all the love and friendship I owe you, and still feel toward you, I will tell you freely why I think you have taken a false step in publishing this letter, and wherein it appears to me you are mistaken."

After adverting to the impropriety of publishing such a letter at that particular time, when the recent disputes that had agitated the connection were scarcely subsided, Mr. Benson says: "Your letter, it is true, may answer one end. It may draw the attention of some from the former causes of debate to others, and the contending parties may leave one bone to quarrel about another. But alas! I fear they will find it equally dry with those about which they have so lately torn each other's flesh. Pray, my brethren, for the Lord's sake, let the people, for whom you profess

to be so much concerned, have some respite Let them have a little time to remember they have souls to be saved, and to use those means that are calculated to save them. How long shall they be kept in the fire of strife and contention? When shall they be suffered to return from pursuing and smiting one another? Before the fresh bone of contention was thrown out, we were only two parties; the one wishing for, the other against, the introduction of the sacrament. But now, so far as your letter gains attention and commands belief, we shall be four. For its natural tendency is to divide both, and produce two parties more; the one of which will espouse, and the other reject, your democratical form of church government."

* * * * * *

"In the mean time, it is not difficult to foresee the consequences which, in all probability, will ensue upon these proceedings. Like the Dissenters in the last century, we shall dispute about plans of government and external ordinances, till the life of religion, and all that is worth contending for, be lost in the squabble; and we shall have nothing left but the dry forms, which the divided parties, on each side, may have secured. You complain of a worldly spirit, of division in societies, and of want of love to the preachers; and yet you are taking, I fear, the very steps which partly proceed from, and partly tend to increase, those evils. How happens it, think you, that the minds of so many are now turned to, and engrossed by, those outward things, but because they have, in whole or in part, lost that inward union with God which once was their all in all, and to guard and preserve which was once their chief care? And do you imagine that to keep them disputing about this and that mode of worship and church government, will restore what they have lost, and give them back their first love? O, no; it will only feed and increase their spiritual disorders. Remember, brethren,

the Methodists very lately were not a people. Permit me, then, to inquire, by what means did they thus rise from nothing? Was it by plans of government and modes of worship? Surely, no; but simply by the word of God and prayer, with the exercise of that discipline which some parts of your letter are manifestly calculated to overthrow."

The authors of the letter in question asserted that the system of Methodist discipline was "antiscriptural and oppressive;" that the people were governed without being consulted; and they ask, "Where do the sacred oracles authorize one part of the human race to treat the other as irrational beings; that is, to rule them without their consent; unless either the weakness of their understandings, or the wickedness of their lives, have rendered them obnoxious to society?" They then quote certain texts from the New Testament, which, they say, "clearly prove that the primitive Christians were virtually consulted in the choice of their spiritual guides, their temporal officers, and in their prudential matters." In reply to these statements, Mr. Benson says: "As you quote a few texts to prove that the primitive Christians were virtually consulted in the choice of their spiritual guides, I must so far notice what you advance, as to desire you to turn to those texts again, and read them in connection with the context; and you will see that there is not one of them that bears the most distant allusion to any thing of the kind. Acts vi, 1, relates entirely to the choice of stewards to manage the poor-money. Acts xv, 22, 23, relates to the choosing of three messengers to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, to carry a message. Acts xvi, 2, speaks only of the good character that Timothy bore among the brethren at Lystra, which, it seems, induced St. Paul to take him along with him as a companion; and the other passage, 1 Tim. iii, 10, refers only to the trial that ought to be made of the integrity and fidelity

of deacons, that is, temporal stewards, before they be put into office, and intrusted with the money belonging to the poor or the church. So that if you can furnish no better proofs than these, that people ought to be consulted in the choice of their guides, you fall sadly short indeed. And, methinks, this circumstance alone might convince you that you are endeavouring to draw us from a Scriptural plan to one that is unscriptural. It is true, in one sense, every man chooses, and must choose, his spiritual guide: he is, and must be, at full liberty to hear that minister or preacher he chooses, and to unite himself to that body of Christians he judges he can be most profited among. But to suppose that the Scriptures countenance the idea of people choosing or appointing their own preachers, is, I am satisfied, without foundation. The Epistles to Timothy and Titus, to which I refer you, are a demonstration to the contrary. The Holy Scriptures take it for granted, what is certainly a truth, that the first and principal end of a gospel ministry is to call sinners to repentance, and reform mankind: and if sinners are only thus to be called and mankind reformed by those they choose and appoint, they will never be reformed at all. For they will either choose and appoint no preachers, or such as will, by their doctrine and example, encourage them in, and not reprove them for, their sins. And although another, and very important end of preaching, be to edify or build up in faith and holiness such as are already converted, yet it is Christ, and not the people, that gives evangelists, pastors, and teachers for this end; that is, by the gifts and graces of his Spirit, he qualifies them for, and calls them to, this work. Hitherto, I believe, we have been on the Scriptural plan in this business; and if you should unite, and, by forming an aristocracy, compel us to change it and adopt the plan of the Dissenters, mark the consequences! Our congregations will soon be like many of theirs, either continually quar-

relling with their preachers, or divided and sub-divided about the choice of them; while the one care and study of the preachers must be, not to profit, but to please, their hearers, and especially those among them that are rich, on whom their maintenance will chiefly depend, and whom they must take care never to reprove for any thing amiss in their spirit or conduct. You talk of itinerancy being at an end; but on the plan to which, if I understand, you are verging fast, it will be at an end indeed. For if our societies or circuits begin to choose their own preachers, it cannot, in the nature of things, subsist two years: this would undoubtedly be agreeable to some of us, as well as you; we should get congregations among you, and be very comfortably settled, at least as long as we could find means of pleasing you and retaining your good-will. But the point to be considered is, would this be for the general good? for the spreading of religion in the nation? I presume the general opinion is, that it would not. Take heed, therefore, I beseech you, how you take those steps which infallibly lead to it."

In addition to the agitation which the letter circulated by the trustees was calculated to produce, the preachers had to endure the pain of witnessing a member of their own body arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after him. Alexander Kilham, a young man who had been appointed to a circuit by Mr. Wesley, in the year 1785, grew dissatisfied with the Methodist discipline; and began to circulate letters and pamphlets through the kingdom, with the obvious design of introducing a new system of church government in the connection. To these letters were affixed the following signatures:—"Martin Luther," "Trueman and Freeman," "Paul and Silas," "The Methodistical Bull." These circulars, with another, which he denominated "The Progress of Liberty," contained not only much of what was false and unfounded,

but more of what was slanderous and defamatory. The moral conduct of several of the preachers was impeached. They were accused of imposing on the people, by introducing improper persons into the connection from selfish motives; that they made mock examinations of each other's characters; that they had been guilty of swindling; and that they indulged in a criminal secrecy in transacting their business. Pamphlets, containing these, with divers other charges and insinuations, were widely and industriously circulated through the length and breadth of the land. Mr. Kilham had been tried at two district meetings, in the course of this year, for these publications, but no judgment concerning him was recorded; the whole case being referred to the decision of the conference.

July 23d Mr. Benson arrived in London to attend the conference. Here he had an opportunity of conversing with several of the senior preachers relative to the disturbed state of the connection, and especially concerning Mr. Kilham, who had contributed largely by his slanderous publications to effect a division in the body. In the evening of Sunday, July 25th, Mr. Benson preached in the City-road chapel, to an exceedingly crowded and attentive congregation: his text was 1 Cor. iv, 1, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." The effects produced on the audience (of which the writer was one) by this sermon exceed description. It arrested and riveted their attention; the eyes of the assembly were fastened on the preacher; his tones of earnestness and feeling excited a thrilling interest in their hearts; and such a divine unction attended his words, as could not easily be forgotten. In the course of the sermon, he took an occasion to show, that the word rendered ministers in the text, literally signified *under-rowers*. "Such," says he, "are the ministers of the gospel. They are *under-rowers* in that vessel of

which Christ is the pilot, or rather the captain. For the church of Christ, like the ships of the ancients, is not only supplied with the *sails* of affections, to catch the favourable gales of grace, and the *anchor* of hope, which they must cast within the veil when the wind and tide are adverse; but, to prevent her being becalmed, and, as it were, stagnated in *lukewarmness* and sloth, is furnished also with *oars* of prayer and preaching. And the ministers of the gospel are the *rowers*, who, when the sea is rough and the wind contrary, are obliged to *toil at the oar*, having hard work to keep the vessel above water. Sometimes it happens, through the subtlety of Satan, that they do not act in harmony, but thwart each other, and row different ways, and are in danger of tearing the vessel in pieces, to the great hazard of the lives, the eternal lives, of the immortal subjects of our heavenly King. If any thing can, at any time, justify an insurrection of the ship's company, it is a case like this, to prevent the instant destruction of the vessel, with all that are in it. Of late some have thought that our *rowers*, like those mentioned by the prophet, have brought us into deep waters, where we shall have much difficulty to avoid being overset, especially as our ship, they say, grows *leaky*, and takes water fast. Be this as it will; it is well that the Lord Jesus beholds us, as from the mountain he beheld the disciples on the lake, when the sea was rough and the wind boisterous, and they toiled in rowing! It is well that he prays for us as he did for them. May he also come to us walking on the water, especially as it is now past the fourth watch of the night, (so to speak,) and some begin to despair of our being able to hold out much longer, having already spent four dark and troublesome years since we lost our *head-rower*. A year ago, Christ appeared for us in our distress, and discovered to us, shall I say, a creek with a shore, termed the 'Plan of Pacification;' into which we were minded, if possible, to

thrust in our ship. But some of us, as it is thought, being in too much haste to weigh the anchor of our former plan, which had so long kept us steady, to loose the rudder-bands of our excellent discipline, which had preserved us in union, hoist the mainsail of our zeal to the variable wind of prejudice and popular opinion, and commit ourselves to the ocean of the people,—we have, it seems, inadvertently fallen into a place where two seas meet, and are in danger of suffering shipwreck: an event this, my brethren, exceedingly to be deprecated, for the sake of myriads of souls, yet unborn, who in this much-famed vessel, originally built of the best materials, might yet make a successful voyage to the port of eternal bliss. For should this happen, although the leading preachers and people, like the fore-part of Paul's ship, may stick fast to the pacific plan, and remain immoveable, yet the hinder part would soon be broken by the violence of the waves of contending parties. Those that could swim, indeed, that had skill and strength to bear themselves up amidst the winds and waters of commotion and strife, might commit themselves to the sea of popular tumult, and escape to land. But it is not to be expected, that of the rest, whether on the boards of loose and new schemes, or broken pieces of the old and tried ship, many would come safe to shore.

"These things, my brethren, I have in a figure transferred to you and to myself for the people's sake, that, if possible, we may have a just sense of the danger into which our connection is brought, by our differing in our sentiments and views, and may see the deep importance of acting in harmony. And although we must not give up the government of the vessel to the passengers, many of whom have but lately come on board, and know nothing about the management of the ship, even in calm weather, yet I am not against our hearkening occasionally to the advice of those, who, having made a long voyage with our late skil-

ful and experienced pilot, are not unacquainted with his plan of proceeding in such storms and hurricanes; that, if possible, he might save the vessel to the heavenly Owner, and the very valuable cargo on board, I mean the rational and immortal spirits on their voyage to eternal happiness."

On the first day of the conference a committee, composed chiefly of the senior preachers, was appointed to examine Mr. Kilham's writings, for the purpose of selecting from them such passages as reflected on the characters of the preachers, or impugned the rules and usages of the body. Two or three days were occupied in examining these passages, and hearing what Mr. Kilham had to say in defence of them; and, after a full and patient investigation of the whole business, the preachers came to an almost unanimous vote, that Mr. Kilham was unworthy of having a place in the body; and the president had the painful duty of informing him, that he was expelled from the connection. But, on August 8th, a letter was received from him, the contents of which seemed to indicate some desire to return. The conference, willing to leave him no shadow of excuse, appointed, with his consent, a committee to converse with him on his case, and to consider any proposal that he might choose to make. The committee consisted of the president, Messrs. Mather, Pawson, Thompson, Bradburn, Benson, Bradford, and Moore. They spent much time with him, and gave him an opportunity of saying what he thought proper; and treated him, as he acknowledged, with the utmost respect and tenderness: but on the rules of pacification being read to him, his answer was, that "he thought many of them unscriptural, and he could not conform to them." The secretary having read the above report to the conference, it was finally determined, that "he could have no place in the connection, while he continued in his present opinions."

The result of Mr. Kilham's expulsion was, the formation of the New Connection; by which from five to six thousand members were severed from the Wesleyan body. In the month of September, Mr. Benson published an Answer to Mr. Kilham's account of his trial; in which he fully proves, that the conference was justified in expelling a man, who not only opposed his private opinion on the subject of governing the connection to the unanimous vote of all his brethren, but resolved to act upon that opinion, though at the expense of dividing numerous societies."

The following are extracts from Mr. Benson's journal: —"January 20th, 1797. I have been employed some time these two last days in reading, with much attention, Dr. Whitby's notes on those passages of Scripture which respect the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and a future state; as also his discourse, subjoined to his notes on the millennium. And I have found what he has advanced on these subjects, in general, very satisfactory, and strengthening to my faith and hope, as well as refreshing and comforting to my mind. And, since I read him on the subjects in question, I have found more than usual nearness to God, and confidence in him, with a hope full of immortality.

"February 16th. I have spent four very comfortable and profitable days, chiefly in writing, reading the Hebrew Scriptures, and in prayer. This morning, in particular, I was much comforted in reading Genesis xiv, respecting Melchizedek's meeting and blessing Abraham; and chapter xv, respecting his faith in God, when he promised that his seed should be as the stars; and God's entering into covenant with him and representing the affliction his posterity should suffer by the smoking furnace, and their deliverance afterward by the burning lamp, passing between the two pieces. I never before had either such a discernment of the meaning of the passage, or was so profited in reading

it. My mind, too, was much enlightened and confirmed in the faith of the gospel; and I found peculiar confidence and nearness to the Lord in prayer, believing that he would hear and answer my petitions for myself, that I might be made more holy and useful than ever; for my family and the church of God, and the nation, now in great distress. O, how sweet I found it to plead with God, and how unwilling I was to be interrupted!—February 26th. At Chapeltown, this day at noon, I had much liberty, and we had a precious opportunity: but at Leeds, both morning and evening, I was much straitened, and had very little either of confidence or comfort; which has distressed me very much. O that I could trust more in the Lord, and resign myself more to him, that I may be assisted or deserted just as it pleases him! But, alas, I am far from having attained this resignation.—March 4th. Blessed be the Lord, he has this morning visited our servant in mercy. Upward of three weeks since she heard me preach on, 'Thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting:' she was in great distress of mind, intolerably burdened with a sense of sin, so that she could with difficulty either eat, drink, or sleep, or do her work. And at last the misery of her mind exceedingly affected her body. Though she frequently wept, yet she maintained that her heart was very hard, and said that she was strongly tempted to think that she should never find mercy. Indeed, she was on the brink of despair. But last night, being prevailed upon to go to bed, about eleven o'clock, a thought struck her mind, that God is said to be found of them that did not seek him. Encouraged by this consideration, she rose out of bed, fell down on her knees, and prayed earnestly for mercy. She soon experienced some comfort; and before three o'clock was so filled with peace and joy in believing, that no doubt of her acceptance with God remained on her mind.

"March 23d. Being informed of some discontents among

some of our friends at Halifax, respecting our plan and affairs transacted at the district meeting and at the conference; and that they had drawn up an Address to the Preachers and People, with a view to publish it; having previously written to them once and again, at the request of Mr. ——, and some others, I rode thither to-day, and met and endeavoured to satisfy all parties. I hope, with regard to several of them, my labour has not been in vain. In the evening we had a very crowded congregation; to which I preached on the nature and sin of schism."

This year the conference was held in Leeds; at which Mr. Benson was appointed to the Hull circuit. Here he arrived September 1st; when he says, "Blessed be God for all his mercies! Although the house is not equal to that we left at Leeds, either for size, convenience, or situation, yet I trust God will give us peace and comfort in it, which I beg he may, and at the same time give us to see his work flourish."

Under date September 27th, Mr. Benson says, "that the affairs of the Huddersfield circuit were in a most distracted state; that the trustees of the Huddersfield chapel had shut it against the preachers, and received Mr. Kilham, Mr. Thom, and their helpers. Most of the society went over to the seceding party, and several in other parts of the circuit. In the Halifax circuit about two hundred members of the society joined what they termed the New Connection. About that time, several chapels, in various parts of England, were, by their respective trustees, shut against the preachers. But in the midst of the storms and tempests which agitated the connection, at that eventful era of its history, God so accompanied the labours of the preachers by the powerful workings of his Spirit, that the numbers in society, at the ensuing conference, were found to amount to upward of fifteen hundred more than they had been previous to the division; and in the course of the

following year, the increase amounted to upward of six thousand members."

December 19th, being the day appointed by government for a general thanksgiving to Almighty God, on account of three naval victories recently obtained, Mr. Benson preached in the morning and evening at Hull, from Psalm l, 14, 15, and Psalm xlvi, 1. "In the evening," he says, "we had almost a Sunday-night's congregation. All the churches also were well attended, and the people seemed very devout. But, to the very great disgrace of this and many other places, the play-houses were open in the evening. I heard Mr. Dikes, in the forenoon, preach a very useful sermon, from Psalm ii, 11, 'Rejoice with trembling.' He showed, at large, what reasons we had to tremble; the contest not being yet over, and we a sinful people."

January 1st, 1798, Mr. Benson says: "I thank God, I have been very comfortable in my mind to-day, and have been enabled to devote myself afresh to God, especially at the meeting which we kept at night, for renewing our covenant with God. I believe many found it a very awful and yet refreshing season. O that I may be enabled to devote myself afresh every day, and to walk more closely with him than I have ever done! And may he more than ever bless my labours!—February 22d. Subscriptions being set on foot in all parts of the kingdom, for the defence of the nation, at this critical time, when we are threatened with invasion from the French, many of our principal friends met this afternoon in the vestry, to consider of the propriety of entering into a subscription among ourselves, and to open a book for that purpose. After a little conversation, we concluded that it would be very proper; and upward of eight hundred and thirty-five pounds were subscribed immediately! After preaching, I mentioned the business to the congregation; and I doubt not that many more will subscribe." Febru-

ary 25th he says: "Stopping in town, on account of the subscription for the defence of the nation, and to make a selection of hymns proper for the approaching fast, I preached this morning on the first Psalm; and in the evening on Gal. vi, 15. I thank God, I was much assisted, particularly in the evening: and, I trust, the word was made a blessing to many. My own mind has been kept in great peace, and has also been comforted to-day, especially during service at the church in the forenoon."

June 1st he spent some time in earnest and solemn prayer to God on behalf of Mr. Edward Hare, a young man who was appointed to the York circuit, where an additional preacher was required. Mr. Hare travelled in the Methodist connection twenty years, with an unblemished character, and with great acceptance and eminent success. He possessed a comprehensive mind, which he cultivated with uncommon assiduity, and with unremitting diligence. His talents as a preacher were of a superior order; and his numerous writings in defence of the truth were distinguished by honest zeal and great force of argument. When interrogated, a little before his death, concerning his views of those doctrines which he had preached and defended, he replied, "They are interwoven with my existence. I might as well attempt to think myself a mere imagination, as strive to disbelieve any of them. The great doctrines of Methodism I love. It is by insisting upon them that good is done. In fact, little good is done in the world without a proportionate share of the vital articles of Methodism." He terminated his valuable life at Exeter, whither he had gone for the benefit of the air, gloriously exulting in the prospect of a blessed immortality.

June 18th Mr. Benson received a letter from one of the preachers in Ireland, giving an account of the cruelties inflicted by the Papists on the Protestants, during the rebellion in that country. "He observes," says Mr. Benson,

"that the rebels, wherever they came, exhibited 'specimens of their cruelty,' burning whole families in their houses, and taking children, who were striving to escape, on their pikes, and casting them into the flames;—that even their women no longer seemed to have the feelings of humanity; a thirst for blood extinguishing in them all the tender affections of nature, with the timidity peculiar to their sex; so that they not only prompted others to these cruelties, but were themselves agents in the business;—that every place was threatened;—and that such was the general alarm, that none in the country dared to confide in his most intimate neighbour, or hitherto faithful domestic, that was a Papist; believing the whole sect united in the plot of rebellion and murder."

At the conference held this year in Bristol, Mr. Benson was elected to the office of president. He so deeply felt the responsibility of that office, that, under date of July 30th, he says, "Having slept very little last night, chiefly through anxiety of mind, I have been very poorly to-day, and have found myself very unfit indeed for the office to which my brethren have appointed me, viz., that of *president of the conference*. This will greatly increase my labour this conference, and allow me little or no spare time; but I hope the Lord will fit and strengthen me for the work."

Having, in his official capacity, to preach before the conference, Aug. 5th, he spent two hours in the afternoon in preparing for the occasion. The chapel was amazingly crowded. He says: "I was much assisted in explaining and applying Ezek. xxxiii, 7–9. Both preachers and people were very attentive, and seemed much affected; and we had a solemn season in admitting the preachers."

Some time in the course of the year 1798, Mr. William Dawson (a name well known in the Methodist connection)

wrote to Mr. Benson, to know whether it was his opinion that he should be more useful in the Church, than among the Methodists. The following is Mr. Benson's answer:—

"*York, October 30th*, 1798.

"Dear Sir,—Having been very much engaged since I was favoured with your letter, it has not been in my power to pay proper attention to it till now. And even now, having only half an hour to spare here upon a journey I am taking into the north, I shall not be able to return you such an answer as you will probably expect. But if I can suggest any hint which may cast light upon your path, I shall be glad.

"Let me observe, 1st. It is matter of very great thankfulness that so many pious ministers have got into the Church, in different parts of the kingdom, of late years, and it is much to be desired that more still should be introduced into it; for, as you observe, 'thousands will hear the gospel in the Church, who will not hear it out of it.' Add to this, we are at no loss at all to procure preachers to labour in our connection; we have more who offer every year than we can take in; but it is not so easy to find persons proper to go into the Church, or to get such as are proper so educated as that they can be admitted.

"Nevertheless, though I speak thus, I would observe, 2dly. It is not in me to determine how far it *will* be your duty to endeavour to get into the Church. Divers circumstances should be taken into consideration; as your inclination and ability to apply yourself to the study of the classics; how far you can be spared from the calls of your father's family, who, it seems, are partly dependant upon you for support. The loss of five years, which, if you went to the university, would be absolutely necessary to qualify you for orders, is a serious objection, which I could not get over, were it not for the prospect of greater use-

fulness afterward; and yet this is doubtful, should it please God to spare your life.

"Upon the whole, the best advice I can give you is, to remember Him who has said, 'Acknowledge me in all thy ways, and I will direct thy paths.'

"If your eye be single to God's glory, and you sincerely, earnestly, and believingly ask his direction, you certainly shall be favoured with it, and not suffered to take a wrong step. Praying that the Lord may make darkness light before you in the business, and guide you continually,

"I remain your sincere friend and brother,

"JOSEPH BENSON."

This letter, though evidently written in haste, was sufficient to show Mr. Dawson, that the obstacles which would be thrown in his way of getting episcopal ordination were of such a nature as should induce him to pause, and deliberate, and ponder the path of his feet, before he made any attempt to get into the Church. And the success with which God has crowned his labours, during a protracted life of active and efficient service in the Methodist connection, must have convinced him long since, that he did right in abiding in the same calling wherein he was called.

Mr. Benson having engaged to visit the circuits in the north, preached on his way, mornings and evenings, at York, Darlington, and Durham, to large and attentive congregations. November 2d he preached at Sunderland: "And although," he says, "I was unwell, having slept none at all last night, yet, I thank God, many seemed much affected." Two days afterward he preached at Sunderland again, from, "Take heed how ye hear." And at six in the evening, such crowds came to hear, that many hundreds, for want of space in the chapel to admit them, were denied that pleasure. "The Lord," says he, "assisted me much; and I trust many felt the word quick and pow-

erful, while I enlarged on, 'God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.'—November 6th. "I explained," says he, "and applied Matthew xx, 6, with much liberty and power; and the people in general were greatly affected. May the Lord make my visit here a means of reviving his declining cause in this populous town!"

During the following days, he preached at Alnwick, Burnop-fields, Byken, Shields, and several other places, and returned to Hull in the latter end of November. January 22d, 1799, he makes the following remarks:—"I thank the Lord, my mind has been particularly comfortable to-day, and I have had serious, sweet, and profitable reflections, while meditating on the truth, nature, and importance of the religion of Jesus, as well as on the person and glory of the Son of God. I see I have not followed a cunningly-devised fable; and that, in spending my life in continual endeavours to spread the gospel, I have not run in vain, nor laboured in vain. But I am persuaded, I should have had much more success, if I had lived nearer to God, been more in prayer, and had more of the divine presence accompanied the word I have been enabled to speak."—"March 17th. Having been kept awake almost all last night, I have been very poorly and low in body to-day. However, I have endeavoured to go through my work of preaching and meeting classes; but with little satisfaction to myself. Alas! what a poor creature I am! How easily unfitted for any service to God or my fellow-creatures! My faith and patience have been much exercised of late, by my wife's indisposition: our servant also has been much afflicted. May all these trying dispensations be sanctified to us."

April 26th he says: "Yesterday and to-day I spent chiefly at Elloughton and Welton, in reading, writing, and visiting the sick. My mind has been kept in peace, and I have enjoyed nearness to God. I have been grieved,

nevertheless, to see the work of God so much at a stand in these places; the word of God, to all appearance, being preached almost, if not altogether, in vain. Last night, at Welton, we had a good many hearers; but, in general, I fear they were very unconcerned. To-night, as usual, we had very few."—"May 18th. In the forenoon I called to see that eminently good, but much afflicted woman, Mrs. Green. I found her, though under a long, tedious, and distressing affliction, possessed of great peace of mind, sweetly resigned to the will of God, and rejoicing in hope of his glory, although not without many assaults from the powers of darkness. She requested me to urge the people everywhere to read the word of God, and make themselves well acquainted with it; signifying that the blessed truths and promises of it were her chief support in this time of trial."

May 27th he went to York, to attend the annual district meeting. Among the regulations proposed to be recommended to the conference were the following:—"We were of opinion," says Mr. Benson, "1. That it would be advisable, occasionally, to meet the servants apart, and also the married and single persons, in our society. 2. That we ought to insist more than we do on relative duties. 3. That evil-speaking is a prevailing sin in our societies; and that to check it, the sermon on evil-speaking should be read to, or circulated in, the societies, as the Minutes of the conference direct. 4. That, to increase the gifts of the local preachers, it would be well for the travelling preachers to hear them frequently, with all possible attention, and afterward mention to them what they might judge erroneous in doctrine, or improper in language, pronunciation, or manner. 5. That our people should be cautioned against unscriptural expressions, when speaking of their experience, —as that of *full salvation*, when they only mean *perfect love;* and against speaking as though a man might be jus-

tified, and not *at all* sanctified. 6. That many of those who exercise in prayer meetings are blameable, in exhorting persons to believe, without explaining to them the nature of faith, or showing them *what* or *how* they are to believe."

In the forenoon of June 2d he attended the service of the church in Hull, and heard a sermon from Heb. xi, 24–26; in which the preacher showed, "1. That young persons, as soon as they come to years, so as to be capable of it, ought to exercise the faculties imparted to them, in choosing the objects they intend to pursue in after life. 2. The things offered unto their choice: (1.) On the one hand, riches, honours, pleasures; and (2.) on the other, salvation, with reproach and affliction. 3. That all God's people make the choice that Moses made. 4. The means whereby, and the ground on which, they make it. By faith; and on this ground, (1.) the pleasures of sin are but for a season; and (2.) they have respect unto the recompense of reward."

June 19th he writes: "I have been low in my mind, and exercised with various temptations, that have harassed me occasionally for years. O that the Lord would interpose and deliver me; or, at least, make his grace sufficient for me, that I may not be tempted above that I am able to bear! I preached with liberty and satisfaction in the evening; and the word, I believe, was blessed to many. But in meeting the classes afterward, I found my mind much exercised with the misconduct of some, and the rash and bitter zeal of others, who seem as if they would tear the little society to pieces, and quite destroy the work of God in the village. I was obliged to exclude two; and I endeavoured to soften the rest as well as I could."

The circumstances of Mr. Benson's family prevented him from attending the following conference, held at Manchester. Speaking on this subject, he says: "I trust, at

least, my lack of service will be supplied, and that things will be as well ordered as if I had been present. And I expect, by staying at home, to have a little leisure for reading, writing, and retirement; and hope it will be of great and lasting use to my soul. God grant it, for his mercy's sake!"

But though he was not present, yet the thanks of the conference were voted to him for his "diligence and impartiality in the execution of his office, as their president." In reply to an official letter sent to him from the conference, signed by the president and secretary, he says:

"MR. BRADBURN: DEAR SIR,—I have received the letter of thanks signed by you as the president, and Dr. Coke, as secretary, in behalf of the conference; and must beg of you to take the first convenient opportunity of signifying to them the deep sense I entertain of the respect they showed me, in choosing me president last year, and of my utter unworthiness, both of being put into that office, and of their thanks for the manner I discharged the duties of it, being conscious of my insufficiency for such a weighty task. I most sincerely love the brethren, and the Methodist connection in general, and have long endeavoured to serve both to the utmost of my power; but have always had to regret, as I have still, my great want of both gifts and grace for so high and holy a calling as that of serving God and his church. I congratulate you on your appointment to the office of president this year; and I doubt not you will discharge it, if not with better intentions, yet with greater ability, than

"Your sincere friend, but unworthy brother,

"JOSEPH BENSON."

August 20th he says: "This morning I finished Beattie's 'Evidences of the Christian Religion,' in two small

volumes: an excellent little work, and well suited to the state of young persons, for whose instruction and establishment it was principally written. It would be well, indeed, if young people in general, of the more intelligent and better-educated class, would read it carefully."—"October 1st. This day we dedicated our youngest child, now eight weeks old, to the Lord, in baptism; and named him 'Samuel,' not because he was *asked* of the Lord, but because the Lord has given him to us in our declining years, and has heard prayer, in wonderfully sparing and preserving and restoring my wife, when, to all appearance, she was not likely to survive. In gratitude, therefore, for his mercies, we give him to the Lord, and desire that he may live to show forth his praise.—October 14th. In the morning I read, with much pleasure and profit, the fourth of Dr. Coke's sermons, on the duties of a minister of the gospel; viz., the sermon on the importance of giving themselves continually to prayer. I was much humbled under a consideration that I had not given myself so much to it as I ought; and that this was one great reason why I had not been more useful, as well as more holy, and why the word had not been accompanied with more unction and been more blessed to the people. I found my mind drawn out in strong desire to give myself more to it than ever; and, by the grace of God, resolved so to do. I afterward spent some time in sweet and comfortable prayer for myself and the success of my labours, for my wife and children, especially for God's blessing on my eldest son, being afraid to dedicate him to the ministry, lest he should not be called of God to that important but perilous office. May the Lord direct me! He knows I would rather he were a preacher of the gospel than any thing else, if I thought God called him.

"November 19th. How true it is, that in the midst of life we are in death! This morning I narrowly escaped

being killed, through a fall from my horse, when I was within a mile of home. He fell quite down, not only on his knees, but upon his face, and I went over his head, and being entangled in the stirrup, he tumbled partly upon me. But, blessed be God, I was very little hurt. Surely, he gives his angels charge concerning us. O that we could trust in him more, and be always ready for our great change, since we never know when it will pass upon us! —January 1st, 1800. This year begins, with me, with affliction and pain. I have suffered much during the greatest part of this day, having had few intervals of ease. However, with the assistance of Mr. Thompson and Mr. Myles, I was enabled to hold the covenant meeting; and I found my mind refreshed and comforted, especially while we were singing,

'Vilest of the sinful race,
Lo! I answer to thy call:
Meanest vessel of thy grace,
Grace divinely free for all,
Lo! I come to do thy will,
All thy counsel to fulfil.'

The whole of that precious hymn was much blessed to my soul. We endeavoured to devote ourselves to God, in the words of Dr. Doddridge, contained in his 'Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul.'—January 4th. These have been four very distressing days indeed. May the Lord support me under this affliction, and sanctify it to me! I bless his name, I find a strong hope that he will. —January 5th. Although this has been the Lord's day, I have not been able to preach, or engage in any public duty. But I thank the Lord, I have found it profitable to wait upon him in private, have had a measure of access, with confidence, to a throne of grace, and been encouraged and refreshed with reading a sermon on, 'The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous.' I trust the Lord, in his due

time, will hear prayer, and remove this distressing affliction. May he do it, for his mercies' sake!—February 22d. I still suffer much. I have been in extreme pain almost the whole of this day. But what have been my sufferings, in comparison of those endured by my Master, or of that noble army of martyrs, some of whom were impaled alive! Alas! that man should be so cruel to man, immersed as he is in miseries, having sufficient sufferings through the infirmity and mortality of his condition, and the ten thousand trials and troubles of life!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Report from the clergy in the diocess of Lincoln—Mr. Benson answers their pamphlet—Observations on the Toleration Act—Mr. Benson's visit to Mr. Mather—An account of his sickness and death—Mr. Benson's appointment to the London circuit—An account of the Rev. P. Dickinson—A petition from the London quarterly meeting to the conference on behalf of Mr. Benson's continuance a fourth year in London—His appointment to the office of editor of the Magazine—His answer to Dr. Hales, an Irish clergyman—Mr. Benson preaches at the opening of Carver-street chapel, in Sheffield—Mr. Pitt's death—Remarks on Popery—Mr. Pawson's death—Mr. Benson begins to write a Commentary on the Bible—His wife's death—He is chosen president a second time—Death of Lady Mary Fitzgerald—Mr. Macdonald's appointment as an assistant editor—Mr. Percival's death—An address from the committee of privileges to the Methodist societies.

In the early part of the year 1800, "A Report from the Clergy of a District in the Diocess of Lincoln" was printed and published; a copy of which was sent to Mr. Benson, by the late Thomas Thompson, Esq., of Hull. In this report the authors express their unfeigned sorrow at the degraded and demoralized state of many of their parishioners. "That not one-third part of the inhabitants of their

parishes attend divine service, and that not one-sixth part of the adults, the communion; that sick persons very seldom require the spiritual assistance of their ministers; that parents and masters are very remiss in enforcing the attendance of their children and servants on divine worship, and on catechetical instruction; and it is with difficulty the children are prevailed upon to attend, or parents to send them to, the Sunday schools; and that there is almost a total disuse of family prayer and reading the Scriptures." They also in this report notice the causes for that neglect of religious duties which they deplored. Among these, they reckoned the circulation of profane, obscene, and seditious writings; the irregular management of ale-houses, wakes, feasts, and dancings; cock-fightings and petty races; with one or two others. But the last cause, and that which peculiarly engaged their attention, and which they most feelingly deplored, was the increase of Methodism. Mr. Benson deemed it his duty to answer this pamphlet; and, "My reason for doing it," says he, "is, because we have received information that it is likely to be the cause, through the influence of the bishop of Lincoln, of his majesty's ministers bringing forward a bill that will restrain our liberty, and abridge our privileges." In his Vindication of the Methodists, which contains forty-two octavo pages, he says, "There is something very extraordinary indeed in this! The increase of the Methodists is the cause of the neglect of religious duties; and yet the Methodists are constantly inculcating religious duties, and do not so much as receive into, or keep in, their societies any person who lives in the neglect of them. But 'you draw people from the church, and from the sacrament at the church.' Suppose this were true, which in general it is not, it would not follow that we made people neglect religious duties, unless it can be shown that religious duties must, of necessity, be confined to the Church of Eng-

land, and that God cannot be acceptably worshipped anywhere else. But I say, *it is not true.* Thousands, in all parts of the kingdom, who seldom or never came within the church walls, till they heard us, but loitered away the precious hours of the Lord's day in their own houses, or in idle recreations, or visits, or in journeys of pleasure, or in such worldly business as these clergymen mention, now see the evil of such practices, and have abandoned them; attend divine service in the Church of England once or twice every Lord's day, and the Lord's supper whenever it is administered in the church, which, in country places, it is to be deplored, is not often."

As one remedy for the removal of the evils of which these clergymen complain, they recommend certain "explanations and amendments of the Toleration Act." On this subject Mr. Benson observes: "So far as the business concerns the Methodists, I beg leave to remark, that it would be an easy thing for the legislature of this kingdom to amend or explain that act, so as to lay the whole body of the Methodists, and their hearers, not fewer, in Great Britain and Ireland, than half a million, under the necessity of formally withdrawing from the established Church, and declaring themselves Dissenters. It is true, the Methodists would not take this step without great reluctance: but they would rather take it a thousand times, than be deprived of those privileges of edification which they have enjoyed in peace for above half a century."

In reply to certain insinuations which had been thrown out by these clergymen, that Methodism was unfavourable to loyalty, Mr. Benson quotes several passages from the Minutes of conference, to show that the most unfeigned loyalty to the king, and attachment to the constitution, were publicly professed by the preachers, and uniformly inculcated on the minds of the people.

April 13th, Easter-day, Mr. Benson preached in the

morning, from Luke xxiv, 34; when he observes: "It was a very precious time. The congregation was much affected, and, I believe, many were much comforted." In the afternoon at the love-feast the presence of God was felt by young and old; many spoke their experience in a very instructive and affecting manner. In the evening he preached to a large congregation, from 1 Peter iii, 18.

About this time a considerable degree of apprehension was excited among the Methodists, by a report that was in circulation, that M. Angelo Taylor intended to bring a bill into parliament, which would, if enacted into a law, greatly abridge their religious privileges. On this subject Mr. Benson says: "Having written to Mr. Ward, jun., at Durham, last Wednesday, to advise him to use his influence with M. Angelo Taylor, their lately chosen member, to induce him to withdraw his intended bill, I had the pleasure to-day of receiving the following answer to that part of my letter:—

"'DEAR SIR,—I have now the satisfaction of informing you that Mr. Taylor has consented to drop his proposed bill, and has promised me to bring forward neither this nor any measure affecting the Methodists, without our previous knowledge and consent. Mr. Taylor needed only a proper and faithful representation of our principles and practice to induce him to do this. His ideas of us were founded on the clumsiest misrepresentation that sin and ignorance could give him. He is now undeceived; and, if he be not our hearty friend, I have great confidence, he will not make himself the tool of our enemies.'"

May 11th Mr. Benson says: "I heard Mr. Dikes, with much pleasure and profit, discourse on James iii, 2, 'If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.' He showed, 1. That not to offend in word, was an evi-

dence of great progress in grace. 2. Pointed out the different ways whereby people offend in word. And, 3. Spoke of the remedies; viz., (1.) To get the heart renewed by the power of the Holy Ghost, because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. (2.) To furnish the mind with useful knowledge, that we may not be at a loss for profitable discourse. (3.) Keeping the heart with all diligence, and the mouth with a bridle. (4.) To examine every night what our conversation has been during the day."

July 3d, in company with Mr. Pawson, Mr. Benson went to York, to visit Mr. Mather, who was near the end of his pilgrimage. "I was exceedingly struck," says he, "to see him so weak as not to be able to speak above his breath. He seemed much concerned for the Methodist connection; and said many things to us respecting the measures which he thought ought to be adopted. Before we left him, we kneeled down and prayed with him, probably for the last time, with many tears, and recommended him to God, scarcely expecting to see him again till the day of final accounts."

Mr. Mather survived after this interview a few weeks only. A short account of his peaceful and triumphant end cannot fail to interest the pious reader. "On Saturday night, August 16th, speaking to his much-esteemed friend, Mr. Robert Spence, of York, he said, 'What I told you upon your first visiting me after my arrival at York, I still feel to be a truth; viz., that I have nowhere to look, nor any thing else to depend upon, for salvation, but Christ; and my confidence in HIM IS FIRM AS A ROCK. My faith has frequently been assaulted, during my affliction, in an unusual manner; but it has never shrunk in the least degree: I feel a blessed evidence of my acceptance, and a sacred sense of God's presence being with me always. How comfortable are these words, *Him that*

cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out! There is no other name, no other Redeemer: on him my soul relies. Mine is a hope of more than forty years: it cannot easily be shaken.'

"On Monday, the 18th, being in extreme anguish, he said, 'I long to be gone; I long to be gone;' and desired me to pray for his dismission. After rising from my knees, I said, that this could only be asked with submission: he sweetly and reverently answered, 'With great submission; with great submission.' After pausing awhile, he said, 'I am happy in Jesus; but my sufferings are very great;' and added,

'Rivers of life divine I see,
And trees of paradise.

O let me be there:—I'll be there, there, there! O that it might be THIS night! O hide me among these trees! Here may I have an abiding place!

'Tis there with the lambs of thy flock,
There only I covet to rest.

But if I may not have the privilege, the happiness, the honour, of being with thee THIS NIGHT, may I be resigned to thy will. O that exercise of praise and thanksgiving! It has been the delight of my soul, my chief exercise on earth. I have loved thy word, thy law, thy people, and I still love them,

Let it not my Lord displease
That I would die to be his guest.'

"On Wednesday morning, the 20th, after a night of inexpressible suffering, he was composed, and slumbered a little. When he awoke he seemed surprised to find himself still in the body, and said, 'Why did you call me back? I have been in paradise. As surely as I shall go there again, I have been in heaven this morning.' Then,

after taking leave of, and giving his dying advice to, the family, he turned to Mrs. Mather, and said, 'As for you, my dear, I can say nothing to you that I have not already said: but,' pointing to the Bible, 'that book is yours, and the Author of it.'

"On Friday, 22d, about two hours before his departure, and nearly the last words he uttered, he said, 'I now know, that I have not sought thee in vain: I have not,—no, I have not.' And then, 'O thou that causedst light to shine out of darkness, shine upon my soul with the light of the knowledge of the Son of God. That name above every name for ever dear, it dispels all my fears. O proclaim, proclaim JESUS! Tell me, shall I be with him THIS NIGHT?' On being answered, 'Yes, there is no doubt of it;' he cried out, 'He, whom I have served for nearly fifty years, will not forsake me now.—Glory be to God and the Lamb, for ever and ever! Amen, Amen.'

"Soon after this his voice failing, he spoke very little audibly; but, by the motion of his lips, appeared engaged in silent ejaculations, till, seeming to fall into a sweet slumber, he silently and almost imperceptibly breathed his soul into the arms of his loved and adored Redeemer, about four o'clock in the afternoon."

Mr. Benson preached a sermon, on the occasion of his death, in Queen-street and City-road chapels, on Sunday, the 31st of August, 1800; and said of him: "No person has been more universally respected among us, as an intelligent and judicious man, a pious and exemplary Christian, a sympathizing and steady friend, and a faithful, diligent labourer in the Lord's vineyard. What was said of Demetrius, by St. John, was indeed very applicable to him: 'He had a good report of all men, and of the truth itself.'"

At the conference this year, Mr. Benson was appointed the superintendent of the London circuit; and in the early part of August he removed to the metropolis. On this

occasion, he says: "I thank God, he has preserved my wife and family, and brought them all safe hither. My wife, indeed, is but in a poor state of health; but the children are all very well. Thanks be to the Lord, for all his mercies!"

The following are extracts from Mr. Benson's journal, written at different times, during his continuance as the superintendent of the London circuit:—

"October 18th. My mind has been kept in peace, although my faith has been much tried, both through my own affliction, and through that of my wife."

Speaking of Mr. Shaw, of Tottenham, he says: "His affliction is great indeed; and so are his patience and resignation, of which graces he is a bright example. May the Lord prepare me for, and support me under, every dispensation of his providence that awaits me."—"December 28th. I thank the Lord, this has been a good day to me, and I have been much assisted in my work. In the morning, at Queen-street, I explained and improved John iii, 16. My own mind was affected, and so were the minds of many of the hearers. In the evening, also, I was enabled to speak with much freedom, while I discoursed on 1 Kings xviii, 21. I was led to speak much concerning the uncertainty of life; and to express my apprehensions, that although we were brought so near the close of the year, yet some of the congregation might be called from time before the commencement of the new year."

It is said, that a gentleman, who had been skeptical in his opinions, was awakened under this sermon; and after having embraced religion, he became a highly respectable clergyman, and a distinguished theological writer. The following evening, Mr. Benson had to preach in the same chapel again, and was informed in the vestry, previously to his going into the pulpit, that a woman who had heard him there the night before, who was in the prime of life

and in perfect health, and had heard him speak so pointedly on the uncertainty of life, had been seized with a violent complaint in the night, and died about five o'clock that morning.

"March 8th, 1801. This has been to me a day of hard labour. I met classes from six to eight o'clock in the morning. I then attended the local preachers' meeting until nine. At ten, I read prayers and preached at Spital-fields. At two, I began again to meet classes, and continued till after five. At six, I preached at City-road chapel, and continued till eight. The congregation was very large. After that service was concluded, I continued to give tickets for an hour."

May 25th he preached in the forenoon in City-road chapel, to the children of the Sunday schools. "I suppose," says he, "there never was any thing like so many human beings in the chapel before. It was a most lovely and affecting sight. They heard, in general, with great attention, and sung most sweetly. I preached on 1 Chron. xxviii, 9. I bless the Lord, I was enabled, I hope, to speak in a manner intelligible and forcible; and I trust that much good will arise from the opportunity."

Leeds, August 2d, Mr. Benson says: "At the request of Mr. Pawson, I have taken his place this evening, and preached before the conference, on the occasion of the admission of the young preachers. The subject I spoke on was Eph. iii, 8. The chapel was so prodigiously crowded, that there was no possibility of getting in or out, or of making the collection for the expenses of the conference in the seats. Indeed, there were several thousands who could not get in; so that there were four different preachers appointed to preach without, while I was preaching in, the chapel. I thank the Lord, I was favoured with a peculiar freedom in preaching; and I believe it was a profitable time to many."

"October 19th. Last night, in preaching, I was led to speak much concerning the shortness and uncertainty of life, and the necessity of complying immediately with the call of God: and the doctrine received an awful confirmation in the sudden death of Mr. W——. He was at the chapel here in the morning in his usual health. Indeed, he seemed uncommonly well and in good spirits. After service was over, he went to dine with a friend at Wapping, in company with Dr. Whitehead, where he spent the afternoon. He heard the doctor preach in the evening, and stayed while he met the society. And it was observed by some, that he sung with all his might. He afterward walked up the street with the doctor, apparently in perfect health, only complaining of being rather weary, as they went through Wellclose-square. He called at Dr. Whitehead's house; and observing that he perspired profusely, the doctor ordered the servant to bring him a little rum and water; but before she came with it, he expired, and would have fallen off the chair, had not the doctor held him up. I endeavoured," says Mr. Benson, "to improve the awful event to-night, at Wapping, by exhorting the congregation, from Matthew xxiv, 44, to be ready, because in such an hour as men think not, the Son of man cometh."

"February 19th, 1802. I have read with attention and profit Macknight's translation, paraphrase, and notes on the first Epistle to the Thessalonians: and I think he has cast much light on the epistle, and improved the translation of many passages; but cannot suppose that the apostle had in view to interweave with his epistle, and set in view before his readers, all the principal arguments in favour of the truth of Christianity. And, especially, I cannot approve of his view of the day of judgment, and the future misery of the wicked; namely, that no particular inquiry will be made into men's actions, but that the form

of every man's body will fully manifest his state and character; and that the bodies of the wicked will be raised corruptible, and will be consumed in the general conflagration.

"April 12th. This evening, while I was praying before sermon, at Queen-street chapel, Mr. Folgham was suddenly taken ill in the front of the gallery, and, after groaning most awfully for a few minutes, expired on the spot. Some of the friends bore him down into the vestry, where I found him on the table, on his back, much altered, when the service was over. It was an awful and affecting scene to those who were present.—May 30th. My time has been fully employed to-day. From six to eight, I met classes. I then met the local preachers. I afterward walked through the rain to Snowsfields, and, after reading prayers, preached at half past ten. Immediately after dinner I returned to City-road chapel, where I was employed in meeting classes till five o'clock. At six I preached on occasion of the Rev. Peard Dickinson's death, from Jeremiah xiv, 8; a text chosen by himself. The congregation was large; and the account I had collected of his life and death was, I trust, edifying to the hearers. Mr. Dickinson was for two years the curate of that venerable man, the Rev. Vincent Perronet, of Shoreham, whose daughter he afterward married. Upon the Rev. John Wesley's invitation, he removed to London, where he exercised his ministry with zeal and diligence, till, through indisposition of body, he was obliged to desist from a calling, which, above all others, he loved, and in which his whole heart was engaged. His discourses with his friends that from time to time visited him in his last illness were most intelligent and instructive; and after the most affectionate expressions of love and consolation to his mournful partner, and other relatives and friends, in the greatest peace, and most triumphant joy, he sweetly slept in Jesus,

on Saturday, May 15th, in the forty-fourth year of his age. His last words were, 'Hark! do you not hear? They are come for me! I am ready,—quite ready. Stop; say nothing but, Glory,—glory!' Such was the safe, happy, nay, triumphant end of Peard Dickinson;—a name not much known among men; but one which, in the great day of accounts, will be found to occupy a place among those who 'shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.'"

November 6th Mr. Benson says: "I have spent a part of these three or four last days in reading Simpson's 'Plea for Religion,' published since his death. It contains much information on various subjects, and is, I hope, calculated to do good; but in divers parts of it he is so excessively severe upon the clergy, that I fear it will prejudice many of them, and of the friends of the established Church, against vital religion, which is now universally termed Methodism."*

January 1st, 1803, Mr. Benson says: "Being mercifully spared and preserved to see the beginning of this year, my mind has been humbled under a sense of my unworthiness, and of God's goodness, and, I hope, sincerely thankful for the Lord's mercies. I have endeavoured to devote myself afresh to his service, and trust it will continue to be my ruling desire to live to his praise and glory. May the Lord help me by his powerful and all-sufficient grace!"

The high estimation in which Mr. Benson was held by the Methodists in London, appears by the circumstance that the June quarterly meeting resolved unanimously to

* No great danger of increasing those prejudices, which were already as deep and strong as they could well be. Few have had the moral courage to expose the gross corruptions of the English clergy, and openly to rebuke their abominable simony, licentiousness, and infidelity. The church is under a debt of gratitude to the pious and learned author of the "Plea for Religion," for such a commentary on the English hierarchy as sets it in its true light.—Am. Ed.

petition conference to appoint him a fourth year for their circuit. The petition is as follows:—

"*To the Methodist Conference.*

"HONOURED FATHERS AND BRETHREN,—Permit us, the stewards and leaders of the London society, to express our unanimous desire, that our highly-esteemed and much-respected minister, Mr. Benson, may be continued with us another year; which, we conceive, he may be permitted to do, in consistency with the rules of the conference; if in no other character, yet as a supernumerary preacher.

"Our reasons for doing this are, that Mr. Benson has had peculiar influence in raising all our different branches of finance to a state they never equalled before; especially those of the Benevolent or Strangers' Friend Society, and the Sunday schools; which the conference will allow to be of great importance in a national point of view. And as these are but in their infancy, Mr. Benson's presence another year seems to be of great consequence for their extension and establishment.

"It also appears to be the general wish of the people throughout the circuit that he should stay; and as our congregations are considerably increased, we hope that his labours for another year will be attended with much good. And, further, the state of public affairs is so critical, that it may, perhaps, be necessary to publish to the world our sentiments and views; and, in that case, we think your permitting Mr. Benson to remain in London is a very desirable measure. We humbly presume, these considerations will induce conference to accede to our request.

"Our prayer to God is, that your plans may be laid in wisdom, and tend to the furtherance of Christ's kingdom.

"Signed by desire and on behalf of the quarterly meeting, WILLIAM JERRAM."

"*June 30th*, 1803."

But however desirous the London Methodists were to retain Mr. Benson among them, the conference, consistent with its own rules, could not appoint him a fourth year in succession to the same circuit; nor could they think of making him a supernumerary, seeing he was yet strong, and able and willing to labour; but as an editor was wanted for our Magazine, and one qualified to take the general superintendence of our book concerns, Mr. Benson was unanimously voted to fill that important office,—an office which he continued to sustain with credit to himself, and benefit to the connection, during the remainder of his life. But, though he was not called upon to preach as frequently on the week-days as he had been accustomed to do, when he superintended the affairs of a circuit, yet in his Lord's-day exercises he knew no relaxation. The metropolis afforded him a wide field for his labours; and being so well known and so highly esteemed as he was in the connection, he had many pressing invitations to visit distant places to open new chapels, or to preach anniversary sermons on behalf of benevolent institutions.

August 28th, 1803, he preached in City-road chapel for the benefit of the Sunday schools. "My mind," says he, "was much enlarged in speaking; and I hope many felt the power of the word." In the evening of that day, he preached in Snowsfields, from Rev. xx, 12; but not having as much liberty as he had on many former occasions, he observes: "I am taught my dependance upon God for every thing. I see I am not sufficient of myself to think any thing as of myself."

September 4th, after preaching at Lambeth, from Titus iii, 3–7, he gave the congregation an interesting account of the conversion and happy death of Mrs. Booth, once a noted actress, of great comic powers and popularity. One night, after her return from the theatre, the house in which she lodged took fire, and it was with great difficulty that

she made her escape from the flames. Her exertion on the occasion, joined to the agitation of her mind, brought on a fever, during the continuance of which she was deeply convinced that she was destitute of religion, and that her mode of life was inconsistent with its principles and practice. And, on her restoration to health, she abandoned the stage altogether, and sought rest for her soul in the reformation of her conduct; but nothing that she did afforded her the least degree of consolation. In a village to which she retired, a Sunday school was established: here she occasionally heard some of the teachers give a word of exhortation to the children; and through the instrumentality of these pious men, she soon discovered the way of salvation. She became a teacher of the poor children at the school in question; and was grateful to God for so subduing her proud heart as to be made willing, in so humble a sphere, to make some good use of the talents which she had previously so much abused.

She joined the Methodist society; and was soon enabled to believe with her heart unto righteousness, and to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. For some days previous to her dissolution, death and glory were the familiar and delightful subjects of her conversation; and she evidently desired to depart and to be with Christ. She had a presentiment that her death would be sudden; and she prepared the mind of her daughter, with whom she resided, for the solemn event. On the Thursday evening she attended the preaching; and on the Sunday following she finished her course with joy. "The congregation," says Mr. Benson, "was greatly affected while I was speaking of her; and especially, while I was endeavouring to improve an awful providence, which happened within a few yards of the chapel the other night: this was a terrible fire which broke out in Astley's amphitheatre, which consumed the whole, and about twenty houses besides."

One lady perished in the flames. A ladder was raised to the window where she was; but, recollecting something which she wished to save, she ran back, and when returning, the floor gave way, and she was seen to fall with it.

In the course of this year Mr. Benson was again prompted to take up his pen in defence of Methodism. Dr. Hales, an Irish clergyman, had published a pamphlet, entitled "Methodism Inspected," in which he strove to hold up the doctrines and discipline of the Methodists to contempt; and he especially lavished his censures on our missionaries in Ireland, for the measures they adopted in spreading religion among the Papists in that country. It is not probable that Mr. Benson would have ever seen this pamphlet, or, if he had, that he would have deemed it his duty to take any public notice of it, had it not been favourably reviewed in the pages of the "Christian Observer." Knowing the extensive circulation of that periodical, and fearing, that by its misrepresentations, the persons by whom it was read would imbibe notions and receive impressions concerning Methodism which have no foundation in truth, Mr. Benson published a pamphlet of eighty pages, octavo, which he rather quaintly entitled "The Inspector of Methodism Inspected, and the Christian Observer Observed." This pamphlet had but a limited circulation, and is by the present race of Methodists almost wholly unknown.

December 31st Mr. Benson writes: "Upon looking back on the events and providential dispensations of the past year, and on my many sins and failings, I find great cause to be both humble and thankful. O that I may be enabled to devote myself more fully to the Lord and his service than ever I have done!"

"January 1st, 1804. In the morning, at Spitalfields, I discoursed, with much liberty, on Psalm xc, 12. The congregation was affected, and I was so myself. In the

afternoon we had a very solemn time in renewing our covenant with God. I found my mind under a sweet influence of grace; and many seemed to partake of the same blessed unction. In the evening at six I preached again at Spitalfields, and was favoured with much liberty while I explained and applied Romans xiii, 11.

"January 29th. I have employed some time this week in perusing Drew's work upon the soul. The reasoning is close, and in general apparently conclusive; but two great difficulties stand in the way: 1st. Have we not our souls by traduction? and if so, are they necessarily immaterial and immortal, and incapable of dying? Does not their immortality depend on the sovereign will and pleasure of God? 2d. Have not the brutes perception, memory, a will and passions? Have they, therefore, in them an immaterial and immortal spirit? The declarations of Scripture are of more weight with me than any philosophical or abstract reasoning I ever saw on the subject.*

"March 4th. In the evening, wet as it was, the congregation was crowded at the City-road chapel, to hear Dr. Whitehead's funeral sermon; and I was enabled to speak with clearness, and, I hope, with some good effect,

* The speculations of Mr. Drew, though very ingenious, are not well based. His fundamental principles in general are mere assumptions, which may be either true or false, but are neither self-evident nor capable of demonstration. But Mr. Benson's objections to Mr. Drew's theory are not themselves so free from mist as could be desired. Whether "we have our souls by traduction" or otherwise, who knows? They are doubtless "*necessarily* immaterial," are *certainly* "immortal," and "their immortality depends on the sovereign will and pleasure of God;" still may not the soul's immortality be made, by this very "sovereign will and pleasure," to depend *immediately* upon its peculiar constitution? This, for aught we can see, may be so. Yet the fact that the soul will survive the body, and have a conscious existence for ever, must rest upon divine revelation, for here only does the evidence amount to absolute certainty.—Am. Ed.

from 2 Cor. v, 8. I then gave a pretty large account of the doctor's life and character. I added, from my own knowledge of him, a short account of his character, as a man—a scholar—a divine—a preacher—a friend—a member of civil society—and a Christian. I trust the discourse and account delivered gave satisfaction to the numerous auditory. They heard with deep attention, and were silent as death; and I hope that the word spoken had its desired effect upon many.—May 2d. A very unfair account of Arminianism having been inserted in the Evangelical Magazine for May, I this day wrote to the editor of that publication, and sent him for insertion a very different, and, I think, a very just account of that doctrine, taken from Gerard Brandt's 'History of the Synod of Dort.' I have told him that I should be very sorry to see the dying embers of controversy revived; or the two periodical publications, the Evangelical and Methodist Magazines, made vehicles of strife and contention; but that if such articles are inserted in the Evangelical Magazine, as that here referred to, controversy is inevitable, as we neither distrust the goodness of our cause, nor fear the want of materials for its defence."

"August 15th. A person from the —— circuit having been recommended as a missionary, and appointed for Nova-Scotia, a few of us, with Dr. Coke, examined him this morning, respecting his knowledge of divine things, and in the evening Dr. Coke, Mr. Taylor, and I, heard him preach at Snowsfields; when we were all thoroughly satisfied that he is utterly unfit to be sent out at present. We have, therefore, concluded to send him home again, to stay till he shall gain more knowledge of what he should teach others; and till his gift for speaking in public be a little more improved. I am very thankful that I have got this accomplished."

December 15th Mr. Benson paid a visit to Nottingham,

to reopen a chapel which had been considerably enlarged. "I pray God," says he, "that my coming may be attended with a blessing; and that I may have no cause to lament that I have run in vain. I thank God, that I was much assisted in preaching both times; but especially in the morning, when the congregation in general were much impressed." He preached again at Nottingham, December 25th, from 1 Tim. i, 15, with much enlargement of heart and liberty of expression. During the service many were much affected; and one man, who cried out in deep distress, professed to have received the remission of his sins before he left the chapel. From Nottingham he visited and preached at Bingham, Newark, and Grantham, to large congregations; and though the weather was intensely cold, and the ground covered thick with snow, yet many came ten, twelve, and even fourteen miles to hear him, and had to return home after preaching.

January 1st, 1805, he returned to London; and spent the early part of that month in providing and correcting materials for the March and April Magazines, and correcting the press for other works. "I have enjoyed," says he, "peace and comfort, and it has been my earnest desire to begin this year with God, as I have endeavoured to begin many.

"January 24th, being in Canterbury," he observes, "I walked to the cathedral, where I found a most miserable reader of prayers, and a few wicked boys in surplices, employed occasionally in what is termed chanting, profaning in a most shocking manner the worship of God. However, the congregation was not large to receive any harm thereby. One old man and one old woman were all I saw, save the few friends that went with me. I was surprised to find this cathedral, belonging to the see of Canterbury, the metropolitan of all England, so much infe-

rior not only to York minster, but even to those of Beverley and Lincoln, in beauty and symmetry."

This year he attended the conference, which was held for the first time in Sheffield. At the request of the leaders and trustees, he preached, both in the morning and evening of July 21st, in their new chapel in Carver-street, to crowded congregations. Speaking of the chapel, he says: "I think it is the best contrived in the Methodist connection; and, except the City-road chapel, and the Oldham-street chapel, it is the largest we have anywhere. I trust the erection of it will be attended with a blessing to many souls." July 22d he preached in Norfolk-street chapel, on Luke viii, 18, "Take heed how ye hear." He chose this subject for the purpose of directing those whom he addressed, to hear with profit the many sermons which would be preached to them during the conference.

On the evening of August 9th the conference concluded its sittings, in peace and harmony; and on the 11th Mr. Benson preached in the afternoon and evening at Chesterfield; and on the evening of the following day at Nottingham. He observes, "I was much assisted in explaining and enforcing, 'So run that ye may obtain.'" On the 15th he arrived in London, after being absent from it about a month.—"September 20th. Judging," he observes, "that practical religion is too little regarded by many of the congregation, and even of the society, I enforced at City-road chapel, 'Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?'" He then adds: "My heart was enlarged, and my mouth opened; and I was enabled to speak strong words, perhaps stronger than some could bear. But surely there is much cause for plain dealing." December 22d his subject was our Lord's transfiguration: during the delivery of the discourse, he remarks, "a manifestly divine influence attended the word spoken; and I

trust some will show by their conduct, that it was not spoken in vain." At Queen-street, in the evening, he preached a sermon to a very crowded congregation for the benefit of the Sunday schools.

January 2d, 1806, he writes: "Reflecting, of late, on the many mercies of the last year, particularly in the restoration of my son John to health, who, in the beginning of the year, was much afflicted, and in the preservation and partial restoration of my wife; I see that I have infinite reason to thank God for these and all his other mercies; and I have endeavoured to give myself up anew to his service. I bless his holy name, I find it in some measure my meat and drink to do his will: and I trust I shall be enabled to live this year more than ever to his glory." Under date of January 25th, the following paragraph occurs in his journal:—"On Thursday last we received intelligence of the death of that eminent statesman, Mr. Pitt. In one respect his sun has gone down in a cloud. The amazing success of Buonaparte against Austria and the Russians, and the terrible disasters the allies have suffered, show that he pursued a wrong plan for the country, and for all Europe, in rekindling this war on the continent, and urging the emperor of Germany, and the emperor of Russia, to come forward at this time to oppose the French. However, God is accomplishing his own designs, and by the clashing and contending interests and passions of men, is overthrowing the man of sin." Mr. Benson was not singular in his opinion on this subject. Many pious people thought that by the French revolution, and the subsequent events to which it gave birth, Popery had received such a wound as would never be healed; that the infidel and political frenzy, which like a desolating scourge had overrun the French nation, had swept away all their superstitions; and that a way was thus prepared for the diffusion of evangelical and unadul-

terated truth through the length and breadth of the land. But there is nothing, in the present aspect of affairs either at home or abroad, that can warrant us to conclude that Popery is less prevalent in its influence, or less mischievous in its effects, than it was a century ago: on the contrary, never were the emissaries of Rome more assiduous in seeking to impose on the credulity of mankind by their "lying wonders" than they are at present. They compass sea and land to make proselytes to their absurd and impious superstitions. How long the mystery of iniquity will continue to work, or the mother of harlots be suffered to make the earth drunk with her abominations, is known only to Him who sitteth above the water-floods, and remaineth King for ever. The obvious duty of all Protestant Christians binds them to support, to the utmost of their ability, those institutions which have for their object the diffusion of a knowledge of the truth, as it is in Jesus. The Bible is the religion of Protestants; and proportionably as Scriptural truth prevails, infidel and Papistical errors will vanish as the illusions of night are dissipated by the bright shining of the sun.

But to return to Mr. Benson. March 11th he says: "Yesterday we learned that Mr. Pawson departed this life, on Wednesday last, at Wakefield. Amidst his very great and complicated afflictions, he was enabled to triumph continually in the hope of a glorious immortality. He has, indeed, left a blessed testimony behind him. May we follow him as he followed Christ." May 11th Mr. Benson preached a sermon in the morning at the City-road chapel, and in the evening at Queen-street chapel, in aid of a society, established in London in the year 1785, for the support and encouragement of Sunday schools, in the different counties of England and Wales. "Since their establishment," he says, "they had assisted with books, or money, two thousand five hundred and forty-two schools,

at which had been educated two hundred and twenty-six thousand nine hundred and forty-five scholars. They had given away two hundred and nineteen thousand four hundred and ten spelling-books; fifty thousand one hundred and twenty-six Testaments, and seven thousand two hundred and thirteen Bibles; and to such schools as stood in need of pecuniary assistance, the sum of four thousand one hundred and forty-seven pounds, eight shillings, and five pence."—May 18th he preached again at Queen-street chapel; when he observes, "I lifted up my heart to God, and he graciously assisted me; and I was peculiarly aided in discoursing on 1 Peter i, 6, 7." Of his discourse he gives the following outlines:—"(1.) The reasons which the people of God have to rejoice. (2.) The reasons they have for sorrow. (3.) That the reasons they have to rejoice far overbalance the other; and that the reasons they have for sorrowing, when properly understood and improved, become even reasons for joy." After preaching he met the society, when he says: "I gave them an account of Mr. Edward Jackson, who died about ten days ago, unexpectedly, but in great peace and triumph, at Burslem. I knew him about thirty-four years, and have reason to believe he was an 'Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile.' He heard brother W. E. Miller preach on the Monday evening. On Tuesday morning, being very ill, he sent for him, and said, 'Brother Miller, you have sometimes expressed some fears respecting the pain of dying; but, O fear not! trust in God! he can support, he does support. Glory! glory be to his holy name!'"

June 1st he preached twice at Lambeth, and gave tickets to upward of two hundred members of the society; when he says: "I bless God, however, I was not at all weary. O that I could continue to use the health the Lord gives me, more and more to his glory! The congre-

gation was much crowded at both times; and, I thank the Lord, I was enabled to speak with a measure of liberty." —June 15th he preached a sermon at City-road chapel, from Rev. ii, 9, on occasion of the death of Mr. Rutherford. "He died," says Mr. Benson, "as he lived, in the Lord; and testified that he found the doctrine he had preached sufficient to support him in a dying hour."

In July he went to Leeds to attend the conference. Mrs. Benson accompanied him to that town. On his way he preached at Nottingham and Sheffield. At Bramley, on the morning of July 27th, the congregation was much impressed while he explained and applied the passage which contains the account of our Lord's transfiguration. In the evening he preached at Bradford, to a vast concourse of people, on the subject of the new birth. "We had," says he, "a most attentive congregation, and a comfortable opportunity." At this conference Dr. Clarke was chosen president; and Dr. Coke, secretary. It lasted from July 29th until August 9th. Great peace and unanimity prevailed during the whole of its sittings; and the preachers departed to their several appointments determined to spend and to be spent for them "who had not yet their Saviour known." August 10th Mr. Benson preached three times, in York, with much comfort. In the evening he was, to use his own words, "especially assisted; when the chapel was much crowded, and the whole congregation exceedingly attentive." August 11th he preached at Pontefract; and the next day, at Mrs. Benson's particular request, he went to Knottingly, her native place. Here such crowds flocked to attend his word, that many could not get nigh the door of the chapel. He preached with unusual liberty; and says, "I hope the word will not fall to the ground."

August 14th, having spent some time at Newark in viewing a steam-engine and the machinery of a linen

manufactory, he says: "It is indeed an astonishing display of the skill and ingenuity of man; and shows how much a finite mind may effect by long and unremitting attention. And what then may not the infinite mind of God effect? What wonder that he should build the universe! and much more, should raise out of the dust the machine of a vegetable or animal body! But herein his works differ essentially and infinitely from those of man; —God's machines propagate their own species."

After Mr. Benson's return to town he was engaged for some time in his official duties as editor, in correcting the Minutes of conference, and preparing matter for the Magazines and other publications; but though he was now about sixty years of age, yet he performed his Lord's-day duties with undiminished zeal and success. Thus, October 26th, he says: "Having walked to Chelsea and back, and a mile at least to dinner, in all about thirteen miles, I have found myself rather weary on my return home. However, I have had a comfortable day, having been assisted in preaching, and the congregations being both times large and attentive. We made a collection for their Benevolent Society, which is yet in its infancy." At Twickenham, November 9th, he met a class, where, he observes, "I had the comfort of finding three persons in it, pious and steady, who had been awakened under a discourse delivered by me six years before, at the opening of the chapel there. I was also informed of another who was brought to the Lord under my preaching that day, and who continues to adorn the gospel. I do not remember an instance of so many being brought to true repentance in so small a congregation, (for I think we had not above two hundred hearers,) under one or two of my sermons. I fear I have frequently preached to two or three thousand hearers, when not so many as one or two have received any deep and lasting impressions. Thus we may

sometimes be instrumental of doing great good, when we do not expect it; and may sometimes do none, when we think we are doing a great deal."

January 1st, 1807, he makes the following record in his journal:—"Blessed be the Lord, who has brought me, and my wife and children, to the beginning of this year, in health and safety. The Lord has greatly, and far beyond my expectation, restored my wife to a considerable portion of health and strength, from a state of very great and long-continued weakness,—and that I believe in answer to prayer. During the year, it has pleased him to give our two eldest daughters a knowledge of their acceptance with God through the Son of his love. And blessed be God, they have, from that time, and indeed for two or three years, given solid proof of their seriousness and genuine piety. My second son has dedicated himself to the sacred office of preaching the gospel in the Church of England. Surely, for all these mercies, I am in duty bound to praise the Lord! I hope I am thankful for his mercies; and I now devote myself afresh to his service. May I and my whole family live more to his glory than we did the past year."—"February 1st. To-day s have been unable to supply my place at Queen-street, according to our quarterly plan. I do not remember that I ever was hindered from preaching by indisposition, or any thing else, before, two Sundays together, since I first gave myself up to the work and was received as a travelling preacher. I bless the Lord, I have spent to-day comfortably, in reading, meditation, and prayer; and, I hope, though prevented from attending the public ordinances, I have been enabled to improve my time, and worship God in spirit and in truth, in private. Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

July 3d he writes: "Our district meeting being held this week, most of my time, for these three past days, has

been taken up in attending the meetings of the brethren, and considering the affairs of the connection in general, and of this district in particular. We have cause to be thankful that all the brethren in the district have walked according to the gospel, and that the work flourishes in most places." July 26th he preached at Manchester. "This," says he, "has been a very precious day. I have been very much assisted in my work, and I trust the word has been attended with a blessing. In the forenoon, at Salford, the chapel was exceedingly crowded; indeed, many scores could not get in. Most present were very much affected while I described the fall and recovery of Peter. In the afternoon, at Bridgewater-street, the chapel was much crowded; and we had a very affecting time, while I explained and applied, 'Why stand ye here all the day idle?' But at Oldham-street chapel, in the evening, the congregation was immense; many went away, not being able to get in at the door; and all were still as night, while I discoursed with freedom and enlargement on Heb. xii, 25. It was a most solemn, and I trust profitable, time to many. I afterward read a letter from Nova-Scotia; when the whole congregation seemed as if nailed to the place, and unwilling to go away. The singers afterward sung, in a delightful manner, that hymn, of which the following is the first verse:—

'Blest be the dear uniting love,
That will not let us part;
Our bodies may far off remove,
We still are one in heart.'"

After attending the conference, which was held this year in Liverpool, he returned to London, August 13th, and "gave thanks to the Lord for his loving-kindness," and for the state of health and comfort in which he found his family. The following Lord's day he preached in the morning, at City-road chapel, from that encouraging

declaration, "All things work together for good to them that love God." "The word," he observes, "seemed to be attended with a blessing, and, as I afterward found, was made a means of comfort to many." October 2d he says: "I have found it very edifying and refreshing to read the proof-sheets of Mr. Fletcher's 'Portrait of St. Paul,' which we are now printing. O what a character does he draw of St. Paul, and of every true minister of Christ! O that I could, in some degree, bear that character!"

"October 4th. I bless the Lord, this has been to me a very comfortable day, in preaching at Lambeth, both in the forenoon and evening. The Lord much assisted me both times. The congregations were very crowded, and very attentive; and in the morning, in particular, many were affected. There seems to be a gracious work among the people, and great unity and love between the leaders and principal members of the society."

"January 3d, 1808, being the day appointed," says Mr. Benson, "for the renewal of our covenant with God, at City-road chapel, I preached in the forenoon on Deut. xxix, 10–14. I showed, 1. That to enter into covenant with God, and even hold meetings publicly for that purpose, is not an unprecedented thing in the church of God, but has been usual in former ages: 2. The nature of the covenant into which we are called to enter, and how we may enter into it: 3. The end for which we should do it: 4. I applied the subject." March 8th Mr. Benson visited a gentleman who was apparently dying of a consumption; and, finding that he was far from being satisfied with respect to the truth of Christianity, spent some time in conversing with him on the evidences adduced in proof of its truth and certainty. He seemed open to conviction; and Mr. Benson entertained a hope that he would be brought to experience the power of that blessed religion, the truth

of which he unhappily called in question. A week after he paid him another visit. "I found him," says he, "much weaker in body, but apparently more desirous of knowing and believing the truth. I had sent him Doddridge's three sermons on the Evidences of Christianity; and I was glad to find that he had perused them carefully, and that he wished to peruse them again." Subsequently Mr. Benson paid a third visit to him, when he found reason to say: "I trust he is now truly in earnest for God's salvation."

May 22d Mr. Benson preached at City-road chapel, on behalf of the British and Foreign Bible Society. His text was Romans iii, 1, 2. "I considered," says he, "1. The appellation here given to the Scriptures,—'The oracles of God:' 2. The advantage they that are favoured with the Scriptures have above others: 3. The obligation which lies upon such to improve this advantage themselves, and to communicate it to others." The following Sunday he preached at Queen-street, in aid of the funds of that benevolent institution. About this time he was unusually engaged in preaching occasional sermons. In the course of a few months he opened new chapels at Brighton, Southwark, Feversham, Marlow, Towcester, Rochester, and Gosport, besides preaching charity sermons on behalf of Sunday schools in different parts of England.

May 4th, 1809, he observes: "In the forenoon, I attended Surrey chapel, and heard a minister from Edinburgh. His subject was Psalm xlv, 17, 'I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations.' He showed at large, 1. That notwithstanding the difficulties in the way, and the efforts that had been used to suppress his (Christ's) name; yet that it had been remembered, when other names, however great and glorious, had perished: 2. The means made use of to perpetuate his name; (1.) The Bible; (2.) Preaching the word; and (3.) The efforts

of God's people. It certainly was an able sermon; but lost, I think, upon three parts of the congregation."

For some considerable time past, Mr. Benson had meditated the design of writing short notes on the Old and New Testaments: but his various and important avocations had prevented him from carrying his purpose into execution; and the duties that now devolved upon him were rather increased than diminished. So that he was constrained to say, "I find daily that I have too much work upon my hands; but how to help it I do not know, as I cannot tell to whom, with any propriety, I could commit any part of it. May the Lord direct me in all things, and give a blessing to my endeavours to show forth his praise!" But though his time was so fully occupied in his editorial department, yet having been urged by the conference to commence the work which he had so long contemplated, he began early in October to write notes on the Bible. Considering the period of his life, (for he was now in the sixty-second year of his age,) and the various duties that claimed a share of his daily attention, to write even short notes on the whole of the Scriptures might be regarded as a task too arduous to be carried into execution. According to the original proposal, the work was to be comprised in one large folio volume, or in two volumes quarto; but Mr. Benson having written copious notes on the early part of the book of Genesis, the subscribers generally were so much gratified with the work, that they expressed a desire that he would proceed as he had begun, and, instead of a family Bible, that he would furnish them with a Commentary. He received information of this from the preachers in different parts of the connection; and "the succeeding conference having expressed a similar desire, he, with a diligence and perseverance of which few young men were capable, proceeded with the arduous undertaking."

November 30th he received intelligence of his sister's

death. She had attended preaching at the chapel at two o'clock in the afternoon of Sunday, November 26th, and about nine on the evening of the following day she died. Mr. Benson says of her: "My sister turned sincerely to the Lord when she was about twenty years of age, at the time I did, which is now three-and-forty years ago. She then found redemption in the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and joined the Methodist society. From that time till the end of her life she continued a member; and, I trust, in general, walked worthy of her Christian profession. Her faith and patience were greatly tried by bodily affliction in herself and family. But she was enabled to put her trust in the Lord, and to resign herself up to his disposal; meeting death, at last, with perfect peace and resignation. May the Lord sanctify her death to me, as also to her husband and surviving children!" In about a month after this, Mr. Benson had to sustain another bereavement, that affected him still more tenderly. The excellent partner of his life, the wife of his youth, the mother of his children, and the long-tried and beloved companion of his joys and sorrows, whose health had been declining for some time previously, was called to exchange mortality for life, January 3d, 1810, in the fifty-second year of her age. "We lived together," says Mr. Benson, "thirty years within one month; but we are now parted until the resurrection of the just. All my children have been much affected at the death of their mother; but I best know the loss I have suffered. And this evening, such a load of sorrow came upon my mind, as I knew neither how to shake off, nor support. However, after a little time I obtained some relief. May the Lord sanctify this dispensation to me, and to us all!

"February 11th. This morning," says he, "I preached at Lambeth. My subject was Luke viii, 18. Mr. Jenkins was to have administered the sacrament; but he being

weak and unwell, I read the service, and gave the bread. This is the first time that I ever administered, or assisted in administering, the Lord's supper. I have always hitherto declined it; and that for one reason only,—that I might as little as possible depart from the Church of England; wishing the Methodists to communicate at their parish churches, as in Mr. Wesley's days."

May 27th Mr. Benson was called to improve the death of Mr. Rankin. In the year 1772, after having travelled in different circuits at home for ten years, he was appointed by Mr. Wesley to superintend the societies in America. Here he continued for six years, preaching the gospel with great success; but at the commencement of the American war he returned to England, and after having resided as a supernumerary in London for several years, he finished his course May 17th, 1810. Mr. Benson says the congregation that attended to hear the funeral sermon, "which was immense, was very attentive; and the Lord in a measure assisted me on the occasion."

At the conference held this year, (1810,) in London, Mr Benson was chosen a second time to fill the office of president. "This," says he, "to me was unexpected till last Friday or Saturday; and it will greatly hinder me in my work of editing the Magazine, and other works, and going on with my Commentary on the Bible. However, I hope the Lord will assist and help me through these difficulties; especially as the burden was laid upon me by my brethren in the course of Providence, and entirely without my seeking." August 4th he writes: "I thank the Lord that he has helped me through one week; and we certainly have gone on in great peace and harmony, and much better than usual. Unto God be all the glory."

January 3d, 1811, after being in the country for a few days, preaching occasional sermons, he returned home about ten at night. After supper, when he kneeled down

to pray, he fell upon the floor, as if dead. "Of this," says he, "my daughters afterward informed me." He then adds, "They lifted me up, and in about ten minutes I came to myself, and found that I was seated in a chair. Blessed be the Lord for his mercies, who did not so suddenly give me over unto death, which would have been very distressing to my dear children; though I have no doubt that I should have been with the Lord, having no other business any day of my life, or any hour of any day, than to live to him who died for me." April 21st he observes: "I should have preached at Spitalfields this forenoon, and at the City-road chapel this evening; but having confined myself almost entirely to my study all the last week, and wrote and read, with hardly any intermission, from about five in the morning till eleven at night, I found myself very unwell when I rose this morning, and inclined to fall down and faint away. I continued all the forenoon, and a great part of the afternoon, excessively sick at times, and inclined to faint. I thank God, I grew better toward the evening. May this affliction be sanctified to me, and all my children!"

June 12th Mr. Benson observes: "I spent some time to-day with Lady Mary Fitzgerald. She is now become exceeding feeble, sinking fast into the grave. But her faculties do not seem much, if any thing, impaired; save her hearing, which is very imperfect. And the graces of God's Spirit, especially humility, resignation, and patience, are in lively exercise. She is evidently ripening fast for glory; and, I doubt not, whenever she is called, will change mortality for life. Happy was the choice she made, when she gave up the gay world, and the pleasures of a court, for the cross and the reproach of Christ." She lived until April in the following year; and on the eighth day of that month, when alone in her room, her clothes caught fire, and she was so dreadfully burned that she survived

but a few hours. Her last words were, "Come, Lord Jesus, my blessed Redeemer; come, and receive my spirit!" Having thus adopted the dying prayer of Stephen, like him she fell asleep, and waked to keep an eternal sabbath in the realms of glory.

In conformity with a clause in her will, her remains were interred in the burial-ground of the City-road chapel. A marble tablet has been erected to her memory, in the south-east corner of the chapel. After her parentage, birth, title, and death, are mentioned upon the tablet, it is added:—

"This monument was erected, as a tribute of affection and veneration, by her grandson, lieutenant-colonel THOMAS GEORGE FITZGERALD."

June 15th Mr. Benson expresses his gratitude to God, that he had been enabled to finish the fifth part of his Commentary upon the Bible; and that the demand for the work was such, that it was necessary to reprint all the former numbers. Having, in substance, expressed himself thus, he turned his attention for a moment to a consideration of the ministerial and literary labours in which he was engaged, and says: "I must not look too much before me; otherwise the prospect of so much labour would quite discourage me. I must take each day as it comes, and trust in the Lord for strength for the day." Such has been the demand for this inestimable work, that a fifth edition of it is now in the press; and no doubt can be entertained, but it will continue to be a standing Commentary in the Methodist connection, and be read with pleasure and profit by generations yet unborn.

June 26th Mr. Benson opened a new chapel at Salisbury. "It will contain," he observes, "I think, twelve or fourteen hundred people, and is well contrived for hearing." It was completely filled in the morning; and at six in the evening many scores could not get within the doors. June

28th he spent an hour in viewing Salisbury cathedral; which, to use his own language, "is a light, neat, and beautiful Gothic structure, not much, if any thing, inferior to that of Lincoln, or even York; nay, it is judged to be the most elegant and regular building in the kingdom. But alas! of how little use is this immense and curious edifice, began in 1219, and finished in 1258; and which, according to an estimate delivered in to Henry III., cost forty thousand marks; but if built now, would doubtless cost a hundred times as much! There is not a place in any part of it for a congregation of a thousand people; nor, I understood, do as many as a hundred generally attend."

This year the conference was held in Sheffield. On his way to that place, Mr. Benson preached three times at Derby, "with much liberty, and good effect upon the minds of his hearers. All were very attentive, and some seemed much affected." July 28th he preached before the conference, from John xviii, 37; on which occasion he observes: "I thank the Lord, he assisted me very much; and, I believe, it was to many a profitable opportunity. There were nearly three hundred preachers, and a very crowded congregation, and all attentive and still as night. I intended the sermon to be introductory to a set of sermons, on the great and leading doctrines of the gospel, to be delivered by different preachers, at the same chapel, in the evenings during the conference."

The editorial work which now devolved upon Mr. Benson was greater than he could possibly perform. To afford him some relief, and permit him to devote a considerable portion of his time to facilitate the progress of his Commentary, the conference appointed Mr. James Macdonald as an assistant editor; in whom Mr. Benson found a most faithful and laborious coadjutor for six succeeding years.

"February 23d, 1812. Last week," says Mr. Benson, "a deputation of our Committee of Privileges waited on

the right honourable the chancellor of the exchequer, Mr. Perceval, at his house in Downing-street, respecting the many instances occurring in different parts of the kingdom, in which our preachers, itinerant and local, have been refused licenses, in consequence of a new construction put on the Toleration Act by Lord Ellenborough and other judges, in the King's Bench. Mr. Perceval received us very politely, showed us great courtesy and kindness, and patiently heard an account of our whole plan and economy; and he gave us the greatest assurance, that his majesty's government had neither intention nor desire to persecute, nor will sanction any kind of religious persecution or intolerance." The following day a circular letter from the General Committee was forwarded to all the superintendent preachers in England, from which we extract the following passages:—

"*London, February 24th*, 1812.

"DEAR SIR,—The General Committee of Privileges are informed, by letters from various parts of the country, that considerable uneasiness has been excited by the refusal of magistrates to administer the oaths, under the Act of Toleration, to several of our preachers, and by the threatenings of some persons to enforce the penalties of the Conventicle, and other obsolete Acts, on our peaceable societies. As many of our friends wish for directions how to act under present circumstances, we say, Go on, in the name of the Lord, just as you have done,—fearing God,—honouring the king,—working righteousness,—and endeavouring by all means to flee from the wrath to come.

"We most heartily respect the laws of our country; but we hold it as an unalienable right of conscience, that every man should be allowed to teach the eternal verities of our holy religion to all who are willing to be taught by him: and although well-regulated societies and denominations of Christians will exercise their own rules for the admis-

sion of public or private teachers among themselves, yet we most tenaciously disclaim all right in the civil magistrate to interfere in these sacred matters, while our teachers are acting in obedience to the laws in all other respects, and preaching the sound doctrines of the purest morality according to the Holy Scriptures.

"We are therefore decidedly and unanimously of opinion, that our preachers, class-leaders, exhorters, visiters of the sick, Sunday-school teachers, &c., should go on as usual in their respective duties. Places of public worship should be registered as heretofore; but if any persons should imbibe a persecuting spirit, and choose to levy penalties on any of our unoffending people, we recommend that the latter should suffer distress on their goods, or imprisonment of their persons, rather than pay any penalties for worshipping God agreeably to the dictates of their consciences. If, however, we should be called to suffer, let us suffer in a Christian spirit, in all meekness; praying for our enemies, ever remembering, that if we even give our bodies to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth us nothing."

CHAPTER IX.

Mr. Benson's continued labours—He opens new chapels at Tunbridge-Wells and Gravesend—The benevolence of some unknown friend to him—He finishes his Commentary on the Old Testament—Obtains a remarkable answer to prayer on behalf of his daughter—Dr. Collyer preaches in City-road chapel before the duke of Kent, the lord mayor, &c.—Mr. Benson visits Cambridge—Two Prussian ministers are introduced into the conference—Mr. Benson opens Queen-street chapel—Finishes his Commentary—His remarks on education—He attends the conference for the last time—Is unable through increasing infirmities to preach regularly—Concludes his public ministry at Walworth—His health rapidly declines—Conversations with several friends during his affliction—His death—Funeral—Inscription on his coffin.

MR. BENSON was now in the sixty-fifth year of his age; and though his week-days were fully occupied in his literary labours, when he seldom preached except on particular occasions, yet on the Lord's day he took his full share of work in preaching, and in meeting classes at the quarterly visitations, whenever he was appointed by the superintendent. June 7th he says: "In the morning I walked to Chelsea, about six miles, and preached for the first time, in their new chapel, with which I was much pleased. The congregation, however, by no means filled it. After meeting two classes, I went a mile or two further to dine, and then walked to Queen-street, to preach in the evening. The day being hot, I was a little fatigued. However, after resting a little, and taking tea, I was much refreshed. At six o'clock I preached with comfort to a very crowded congregation. After preaching, at Mr. Butterworth's desire, I read to the congregation an account of the conversation which the Rev. Mr. Wilson had had with Bellingham, the assassin of Mr. Perceval, in his cell at Newgate, before he was executed. It appears he did not die a penitent, but quite hardened." The horrid deed, to which Mr.

Benson refers, was perpetrated about a month before: Mr. Perceval was in the lobby of the House of Commons, when he was shot dead with a pistol, by a wretch who pretended that he had lost some property in Russia, which he thought our government ought to restore. "Mr. Perceval had," says Mr. Benson, "pledged himself to bring into the House of Commons a bill, to secure us and the Dissenters the privileges of the Toleration Act, in opposition to the new construction put upon it in some late trials in the court of King's Bench.

On the 24th day of this month Mr. Benson, assisted by Mr. Reece, opened a new chapel at Tunbridge-Wells: on which occasion he observes: "Blessed be the Lord, we had a remarkably good day. The little chapel, which will hold about four hundred people, was completely filled three times. In the morning I preached on Romans i, 16; and in the evening, on Luke xxiv, 47. I was much assisted both times, but especially in the evening. Mr. Reece, in the afternoon, gave us a very good sermon on Christian zeal, from Galatians iv, 18."

About a fortnight after, he again engaged in a similar work at Gravesend, where a new chapel had been recently erected. "In the forenoon," he says, "I preached with much liberty on 1 Corinthians iii, 11–13. Mr. Stephens preached in the afternoon, on our Lord's raising the widow of Nain's son, from Luke vii, 11. In the evening I preached again, when my subject was Luke xv, 7. The chapel was crowded with very attentive hearers; and the Lord again favoured me with much enlargement of mind, and liberty of speech."

Sunday, July 26th, being at Sheffield, on his way to the Leeds conference, "I have," says he, "preached twice this day at Carver-street chapel; and each time to a congregation of not less, I think, than two thousand or two thousand five hundred hearers, who were all as still as

night, and many much affected. The Lord filled my mouth with arguments, and enabled me to bear a faithful testimony to the truth, such as I believe many felt. O that the good impressions made may not die away, but produce a lasting effect!" Having to preach at Albion-street chapel, Leeds, on the evening of August 2d, although he went there an hour before the time for commencing the service, yet such was the eagerness of multitudes to hear him, that it was with difficulty he could press through the crowd into the pulpit. And after the chapel was completely filled, such great numbers assembled at the place, that three very large congregations were formed, which three of the preachers addressed in different parts of the street.

January 17th, 1813, he observes: "An unknown friend called upon me one evening lately, and gave me forty-five pounds to distribute in charity among the poor." After mentioning how he had disposed of the greater part of that sum, he adds, in relation to the friend from whom he received it, "His care is to do good in secret; and, blessed be God, I have met with many such of late."

May 9th he preached a sermon at Hammersmith, on the occasion of the death of Mr. William Williams, the superintendent preacher of that circuit; a man of a strong understanding, and of a clear and sound judgment, especially in the word of God. He was particularly attentive to the ministerial improvement of his junior colleagues: his large and valuable mental stores were always at their service; and several of them have acknowledged with gratitude to God the advantage which they have derived from his kind and intelligent conversation. He had much of the presence of God with him in his illness, and his last words were, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Even so, Lord Jesus! Amen." "I hope," Mr. Benson observes, "that his death will be made the means of spiritual good to many, and of increasing the congregation,

which has generally been small since the chapel has been opened."

May 16th he preached, morning and evening, in the new chapel at Wednesbury; and Mr. Morley preached in the afternoon. "It is," Mr. Benson observes, "most pleasantly situated on the side of a hill fronting the west, and very conspicuous from the road leading to Birmingham. It has a charming circular gallery, capable of seating probably near four hundred people. The body of the chapel below is chiefly intended for the accommodation of the poor, and therefore is not filled with pews, except a certain space to the right and left of the pulpit. The whole chapel will comfortably contain twelve or thirteen hundred people. The Lord was pleased to assist us in preaching; and, to our astonishment, the sum collected, including a few pounds given at Dudley the next day, amounted to two hundred and thirty pounds; and this chiefly from colliers and gun-lock makers!" Having preached at Bilston and Dudley the two following days, he observes: "I was surprised to see the change in this country since the year 1790, when I was in the Birmingham circuit. Through the whole country, from Birmingham to Wolverhampton, from south to north, about fifteen miles, and for ten miles from east to west, we have a chapel every mile and a half, or every two or three miles. This hath God wrought! This, under God, is the fruit of our people's taking joyfully the spoiling of their goods at Wednesbury, and the neighbouring places, in 1743 and 1744."

July 25th he writes: "Having, as I have thought, no particular call to go to conference, and wishing to save all the time possible for my Commentary on the Bible, and the rather, as I have now entered upon the book of Isaiah, I have determined to stay quietly at home, and go on with my work. I was so peculiarly assisted in preaching to a large congregation, both forenoon and evening, at the City-

road, that I cannot doubt of my having done right in making this determination. I shall get forward with my Bible, and redeem the time I lost in going into Staffordshire: I shall be useful, I hope, in preaching, Mr. Myles only being left in the circuit: I shall save myself much fatigue of body, and vexation of mind. Blessed be the Lord for his goodness!"

January 1st, 1814, having mentioned several particulars relative to a severe affliction under which one of his daughters laboured at that time, he says: "Thus has it pleased the Lord that we should conclude one year and begin another, under his chastening hand. May the trying dispensation be sanctified to her, and to the whole family! As he is thus trying and pruning us, may we bear more fruit to his glory." The following day, at eleven o'clock, he read prayers and preached at Hinde-street: the service continued until after one o'clock. At half-past two he kept a meeting at the chapel for the renewing the covenant: it was after four when this service was concluded. He then administered the Lord's supper to about five hundred communicants. "I had not finished," he observes, "till near six. I preached again at seven to a large congregation, and concluded about half-past eight. I was much assisted in every part of the service during the day; and I trust many were edified, quickened, and comforted. Many at the covenant meeting were much affected." January 24th he says: "This evening, the same friend, whom I do not know, that two years ago left with me twenty pounds, to be distributed at my discretion to the poor, and who last year left with me forty-five pounds, saying, the Lord had prospered him, called upon me, and left with me seventy pounds for the same purpose, and said, 'The more I give the Lord, he blesses me the more.' I wished to know his name, but he declined giving it me. Blessed be the Lord, that there are those to be found who

do such extensive good, and yet wish not to be known to do it; in this conscientiously and exactly obeying Christ's command in Matthew vi, 1–4."

It is much to be regretted that such instances of noble, disinterested benevolence are rarely to be found: men who "do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame." Mr. Benson, indeed, mentions, that he had met with many such examples of late; but in this respect, he was certainly more highly privileged than most of his brethren. Ministers are frequently called to visit the sick, and especially the afflicted members of their flocks, many of whom are in humble life, and in abject and destitute circumstances; and it is a source of inexpressible grief to them, that while they are ministering to them the consolations of religion, and pouring out their hearts in prayer to God on their behalf, they have no means of supplying their temporal wants, or of furnishing them with such things as in their afflictive circumstances they require. Many members of Christian churches have all things and abound; and were they to put into the hands of their ministers but a small portion of their superfluous wealth, and allow them to become the almoners of their bounty, they would thus make themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, cheer the minds of the destitute, and cause the widow's heart to "sing for joy."

April 17th Mr. Benson says: "This morning I walked to Chelsea, where I read prayers, preached, and administered the Lord's supper in the forenoon, with much comfort. In the evening I preached again, and was favoured with peculiar liberty and enlargement. Afterward I walked home, and thereby walked, upon the whole, at least fourteen miles, besides performing the other services in which I engaged. I thank God for giving me such strength and health in my advanced age."

At the earnest request of Mrs. Mayer, of Cale-green,

near Stockport, her son, and many other friends, Mr. Benson consented to go to Stockport, in order to preach a sermon on account of the death of his old, excellent friend, who had, for a long series of years, been a very respectable local preacher; and had, through every stage of his long Christian course, adorned the doctrine of God his Saviour. Having arrived at Cale-green, he preached in the morning of December the 11th, in the Hill-gate chapel, Stockport, to a crowded audience, on the occasion of Mr. Mayer's death, from 2 Tim. iv, 7, 8. He was favoured with much freedom on the occasion; and both himself and the congregation were much affected. Again, in the evening, he addressed a congregation, consisting of not less than three thousand hearers, in a large room belonging to the Stockport Sunday school. His text was Rev. xx, 11, 12. "The Lord," says he, "favoured me with peculiar liberty. It was indeed one of the most solemn times I ever had. May the effect be lasting."

December 18th he preached twice in Oldham-street chapel, Manchester. In the forenoon the chapel was completely filled; and in the evening, before it was quite time to begin, the crowd was so great, that, in order to prevent confusion, it was judged prudent to shut the doors, and lock the iron gates which separate between the street and the chapel yard, and to admit no more: hence many hundreds were excluded. The greatest order was preserved within; and seriousness and solemnity were apparent throughout the whole congregation. Visiting Leicester on his return, at the Rev. Robert Hall's request, he preached in the chapel occupied by that eminent and eloquent preacher of the gospel. "We had," says Mr. Benson, "both Baptists and Methodists; and I was enabled to preach with liberty and comfort on 1 John v, 11, 12. The congregation was very attentive, and I hope did not hear in vain."

"Jan. 1st, 1815. To-day," he says, "I have preached twice at Westminster, kept a covenant meeting, and administered the Lord's supper. In the morning my subject was Rom. xii, 1; and in the evening, Josh. xxiv, 15. I thank God, I was much assisted both times. At the covenant meeting in the afternoon, and the Lord's supper afterward, we had a very affecting and precious opportunity. Many, I believe, were greatly refreshed." He preached at Lambeth, Jan. 15th, from Luke i, 74, 75; on which text he says: "I endeavoured to show, 1. What is necessary to be done for us, in order to our serving God acceptably; viz., that we must be delivered out of the hands of our enemies: 2. The nature of that service; that it must be without fear, &c.: 3. That the whole, viz., our deliverance out of the hands of our enemies, and inclination and power to serve God, are of grace: 'That he would grant,' &c."

February 19th, after preaching at City-road chapel, he read to the congregation several interesting letters, recently received from some of our missionaries at Ceylon. "The Lord," he remarks, "seems in a very extraordinary way to have opened a door for their usefulness. The death of Dr. Coke, instead of proving the ruin of the mission, seems to have been overruled greatly for the furtherance of it."

March 23d he gratefully notices the progress which he had been enabled to make in his great work, saying: "I bless God, I this morning finished my Commentary on the Old Testament; having been employed in it since the latter end of the year 1809, and not having a line written before. The Lord has graciously assisted me, and preserved me in health, though I have been generally employed at it from five in the morning till nine or ten at night; and frequently have not gone out of the chapel-yard during the whole week, except on the Lord's day, when I always have preaching and walking enough. What reason have I to praise the Lord for his goodness!"

October 4th Mrs. Mather, one of Mr. Benson's daughters, after having had no use of her feet for more than twelve months, obtained such sudden relief, in answer to prayer offered to God on her behalf by her father and another minister, that she was enabled, in an instant, to rise and walk as if she had never been affected by lameness. Her father, her husband, Mrs. Dickinson, Mrs. Tooth, and Mr. Macdonald, were present on the occasion. They all believed that the power to walk which she suddenly received was communicated by an immediate act of Omnipotence. That extraordinary interpositions of Providence are sometimes vouchsafed, in answer to fervent, importunate prayers, is no more than the Scriptures warrant us to believe: "The prayer of faith shall save the sick." By the prayer of faith is meant, prayer offered in faith; for prayer is only efficacious when it is mixed with faith. In the primitive times, when miracles were in their full force and vigour, the effect is always ascribed to faith: "Thy faith hath made thee whole:" "His name, by faith in his name, hath made this man strong." The disciples, though invested with extraordinary gifts, could not cure the lunatic for want of faith: "I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him:" and Christ assured them that the sole reason why their efforts were unsuccessful was their unbelief. Many instances are on record of persons being recovered from sickness, and restored to health, in answer to believing prayer; and Mr. Benson, who was no enthusiast, attributed the removal of his daughter's lameness to the interposition of God, and he gave him all the glory.

November 29th the novel spectacle of a royal duke in a Methodist chapel was exhibited at City-road. Dr. Collyer preached a sermon there in aid of the British and Foreign Schools; and the duke of Kent, together with the lord mayor and other distinguished personages, were present

on the occasion. The duke, who was a great friend of charitable institutions, conversed condescendingly and affably with those individuals who waited in the vestry to receive his royal highness. The crowd that assembled was much greater than the chapel could contain. "The service," says Mr. Benson, "was performed in a very solemn manner: and all present seemed to be attentive. The sermon was excellent; and the collection amounted to £117."

March 14th, 1816, being at Cambridge, Mr. Benson preached in the little Methodist chapel erected about half a mile from the town. The existence of that chapel is, under God, owing to William Beacock, a plasterer. He went to Cambridge to follow his business; and finding the Methodists few in number, and without a chapel, he determined, if practicable, to erect one. He stated this to some pious friends, from whom he received no encouragement; but others, entering into his views, rendered him every assistance in their power. In the spring of the year 1815 he purchased a piece of ground, and agreed for building materials, which were immediately supplied. He proceeded to build; toiled most indefatigably; and soon, to the astonishment of all, completed the chapel; having, with his own hands, and frequently without the help of a labourer, done the work of bricklayer, plasterer, and slater; and this he did while he steadily refused to make any charge whatever for his labour; nay, in addition to this, he subscribed five pounds. This, however, the trustees of the chapel refused to accept, and made him a small present, which, yielding to their importunity, he accepted.

Mr. Benson spent a part of the following day in viewing the colleges and the situation of Cambridge. "The buildings in general," he observes, "are inferior to those of Oxford. The chapel, however, belonging to King's College, is a very beautiful and grand building, equal certainly

to any in Oxford; nay, it is supposed to be one of the finest pieces of Gothic architecture now remaining in the world." March 17th he preached three times at the anniversary of the opening of the chapel at Lynn. The following day he proceeded to Swaffham; and thence to Norwich, and to Yarmouth: at each of which places he preached with comfort to himself, and much apparent success; and having returned to Norwich, March 23d, he preached there thrice on the 24th, to use his own words, "with liberty and comfort."

In giving an account of the annual conference, which was held this year in London, Mr. Benson mentions the case of two Prussian ministers, sons of the aged and pious bishop of Berlin. They came to England, chiefly, to gain information concerning its religious institutions. They had heard many contradictory reports concerning the Methodists; and, wishing for certain information relative to them, Mr. Butterworth, in order to their obtaining it, politely sent them in his carriage, accompanied by Mr. Robert Newton, to City-road, where they were admitted into the conference in the morning of August 10th. The conference readily and affectionately received them; and, on taking their seats, they were addressed by Mr. Reece, the president, on the nature and design of the Methodist institution. Mr. Benson, Mr. Henry Moore, and Dr. Clarke spoke to them on the same subject; especially respecting the doctrine and discipline of the Methodists. They appeared to be highly gratified by the information they received; and expressed a hope that the Methodists would form a band of union between the truly pious of the established Church and those among the Dissenters of different denominations. They gave the conference an account of a revival of vital religion in Prussia and in Germany.

November 3d Mr. Benson preached at Southwark, from John iv, 23, 24. The following are his reflections on the

subject:—"Alas! how little of this true worship is there in most Christian congregations! How much formality, lukewarmness, and even deadness! How little adoration of Jehovah's matchless glories! How little reverence for his boundless power! How little humiliation and abasement before his unspotted purity, and impartial justice! How little confidence in his never-failing mercy! How little love to him for his unspeakable love to us! How little sincere, fervent desire for the blessings we ask in prayer, or faith in God's providence respecting them! How little gratitude for his numberless benefits, when we give him thanks! And in hearing his word, how little is the word received in faith, and in the love of it; and how many are *hearers only* and not doers of the word!"

September 25th, 1817, the new chapel in Great Queen-street, London, was opened for public worship. At the request of the trustees and stewards, Mr. Benson preached in it in the forenoon of that day, from Romans i, 16. "The chapel," he observes, "was well filled, and I was assisted in speaking." Mr. R. Newton preached in the afternoon, and Mr. R. Watson in the evening. Of both their discourses Mr. Benson speaks in strong terms of approbation; and the trustees, stewards, and principal persons in the society requested that the three sermons might be published.

November 9th Mr. Benson preached a sermon in Southwark chapel, on account of the sudden and much-lamented death of the princess Charlotte of Wales. His subject was 1 Peter i, 24, 25. This led him to speak of the frailty of man, and the brevity and uncertainty of human life; and, toward the close of the discourse, he related some anecdotes very favourable to the character of the deceased princess. In the evening of that day he delivered a sermon at City-road chapel, on account of the death of Mrs Kruse, a very pious and excellent class-leader, who had for fifty-nine years adorned her Christian profession.

March 14th, 1818, Mr. Benson gratefully observes: "I thank God I have now completed my Commentary on the Bible, undertaken at the desire of the conference held in Manchester, A. D. 1809, and begun in November of that year; so that I have had it in hand a little more than eight years; during which time, I have generally been employed upon it, and the Magazines and other publications, from five in the morning, winter as well as summer, to eleven at night, allowing time only for meals. Added to this, most Sundays I have read prayers in one or other of our chapels once, and preached twice in London, or its vicinity, and frequently have walked the same day, eight, ten, or even twelve miles, and sometimes fourteen or fifteen: so that, certainly, if the Lord had not in a peculiar degree strengthened me, it would have been impossible for my feeble frame to have so long sustained such confinement, and such labours. I believe I can say, too, that God has, in a singular manner, directed me, and given me light in his word; so that I trust I have been able in a satisfactory manner to explain most difficult passages, and to give, in general, the true sense of the divine oracles. My labour has been hard, and I have been frequently straitened for time; but my work has not been unpleasant, but rather delightful; and while I have been endeavouring to edify others, I have been edified myself. To God be all the glory."

In compliance with the earnest entreaties of his friends in Hull, he attended their annual missionary meeting, held April 15th, at which he was called to preside. He observes: "I endeavoured to show the great importance of missions to the heathen, and to such of our colonies as were destitute of evangelical ministers, and the great success which had attended the labours of our missionaries. Many very excellent speeches were delivered by the preachers and others, from different parts. The chapel was quite crowded, and the meeting continued five hours."

Under date of May 28th, Mr. Benson mentions the death of the Rev. George Story, who had died a few days previously, in the eightieth year of his age. He became an itinerant preacher among the Methodists in the year 1762; and thirty years after was appointed editor of the Methodist Magazine, and then superintendent of the conference printing-office. He was a man of considerable knowledge, and of eminent piety.

November 1st Mr. Benson, at the City-road chapel, informs us, that in preaching from Hebrews xii, 16, he spoke very strong things, especially when adverting to the case of the ungodly children of religious parents. That there are so many of that unhappy description is chiefly owing to their not having been favoured with a sufficient degree of personal *religious* instruction, nor *subjected* to *proper* discipline. This is a subject which merits the serious attention of all parents, and especially of those who are professedly religious. They are under peculiar obligations to train up their children in the way they should go; and that this is practicable, may be inferred from the precept. God enjoins nothing that he does not communicate the power to perform. There may be instances, in which Christian parents may seem to have laboured in the work of education in vain, and to have spent their strength for naught. The children for whom they have wept, and prayed, and laboured, may have turned a deaf ear to their instructions, and poured contempt upon their admonitions. But how rare are such instances! The want of success is more frequently attributable to the dereliction of duty, on the part of the parent, than to an incorrigible obstinacy on the part of the child. Pious and well-directed efforts in the educational department must, to a certain extent, meet with success; and it is very questionable, whether there are any instances on record of persons dying in an unconverted state who had been brought up by their parents

in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Duties rightly discharged can never be wholly fruitless. They have often a reaction upon our own spirits, even when they fail to answer the direct end for which they are designed. Parents are not always permitted to see the fruit of their labours in this world. God may, for reasons known only to himself, conceal this from them. Some have gone sorrowing to the grave, and have had their last moments imbittered by the fearful foreboding that their children were treasuring up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God; and yet those children have risen up and blessed the memories of their parents, even when the tongues that had poured benedictions upon them were cold in death, and the hands that had guided their infant steps had forgotten their cunning.

January 17th, 1819, having to edit "Arndt's True Christianity," Mr. Benson observes: "The grand point which Arndt insists on, and which is undoubtedly according to Scripture, is, that the very essence of Christianity is a conformity to the life of Christ; with which the lives of most professing Christians are utterly at variance, being earthly and carnal, and, too generally, devilish also."

Mr. Benson now felt the infirmities of age creeping slowly, but perceptibly, upon him. He had passed his seventieth year; and his love for quiet and retirement increased with his years: but, after much hesitation, he was prevailed upon to attend the conference, which was this year held in Bristol; and it was the last conference he was ever permitted to attend. Sunday, July 25th, he preached twice at Bath: and the following morning he went on to Bristol, where he observes: "I was very agreeably accommodated at Mr. Hall's, and happy in the company of all the four preachers they entertained besides myself." On the morning of August 1st he preached in

St. Philip's chapel. Most of the preachers were present, and a very large congregation. "The Lord," says he, "greatly assisted me in explaining and applying 2 Cor. ii, 14–16." The following Sunday evening he preached in King-street chapel, to a very crowded congregation of preachers and people, from Col. i, 27, 28. The conference having concluded on the evening of August 11th, he set out from Bristol on the 12th, and arrived in London about noon the following day.

October 21st he says: "Having been greatly weakened by a distressing complaint, three weeks ago, which continued near a fortnight, and the weather setting in very cold and stormy, I have found myself very chilly, and unable to bear it, as I used to do, being now almost seventy-two years of age. May I remember, and prepare for, my departure out of time into eternity." A few days after he adds: "I have found it very profitable to-day to review my whole past life, and humble myself before God, for my numerous failings, both as a Christian and a minister of Christ. I hope, however, my eye has been single, and my heart upright before God, during all the years I have been employed in his work; and, indeed, from the time of my conversion in 1765." November 14th he was unable to attend his appointment at City-road. Mr. Watson took his place in the morning, and Mr. Bunting in the evening; when collections were made in aid of the Sunday schools. "Doubtless," says Mr. Benson, "through this change, a much greater collection has been obtained than I should have gotten, who have frequently preached at this and our other chapels these nineteen years."

December 19th he thus expresses himself: "My chief concern is, and I trust will be to my dying day, to live to God myself, and to induce as many others as possible to live to him. Lord, teach my ignorance, and help my weakness, and give thy blessing to my endeavours to show

forth thy praise, and glorify thee *in* and *with* my body and spirit, which are thine; *in* my body, by temperance, chastity, purity; and *with* my body, by employing all its members, and every degree of health and strength which thou givest, to thy glory: *in* my spirit, by humility, resignation, patience, contentment, meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering, benevolence, faith, hope, love, and every grace; and *with* my spirit, by using my understanding, judgment, memory, conscience, will, affections, and all my faculties, to thy honour and praise."

December 25th, though unable to preach, yet he writes thus: "It is, I believe, the first and only Christmas-day these fifty years in which I have not preached at least once; but, indeed, I have generally preached twice on this blessed day, and not seldom three times. Thanks be to the Lord, for giving me health and strength so long; and may he enable me, with patience and resignation, to bear this trying dispensation of his providence; and may he sanctify it to me!"

The following day he preached once at Queen-street chapel; and after dining and spending a comfortable hour with Mr. and Mrs. Butterworth, he walked home, but he was very much fatigued before he got to City-road. The effects of the coldness of the air, joined to his exertions through the day, were, that he coughed almost without intermission throughout the night, and he was unable to sleep a single moment. Most of the three following nights he slept very little; and the consequence was, that his mind was considerably depressed. "However," he says, "I have been enabled to say, from the heart, to my merciful Preserver, who careth for me and all his children, '*Father*, thy will be done.'"

December 31st he observes: "The Lord has mercifully preserved me to see the last day of the year, though in a state of greater affliction, and longer continued, than I ever

before experienced. I have employed much of the day in examining myself respecting the present state of my soul, and my whole past life, and my prospects with respect to eternity. I have seen many things in my spirit and conduct, from my youth, for which I have great reason to be abashed before God, and on account of which I am ashamed and humbled; and yet I thank God I have, I hope, had my conversation in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity; aiming to glorify God, and serve my generation according to his will. I have not pursued, in whole or in part, the riches, honours, or pleasures of the world, or a life of ease; but I have laboured to be useful, relying on the Lord for his blessing, which, blessed be his name, he has not withheld, but rendered, I trust, my preaching and writing a means of spiritual good to many. Nevertheless, so much imperfection has accompanied all my endeavours to do good, that I have great reason to say to the Lord, 'Not unto me, but unto thy name, be the praise; and it is of thy mercy that I am not consumed.' I have also looked back on the mercies of the year; and have seen great reason to acknowledge, with respect to myself and all my children and children's children, the superintending care and guidance of a gracious Providence, which has watched over me and mine; and, in answer to prayer, has, time after time, interposed for my direction in difficulties, succour in temptations, and support in trials and troubles. My heart has been impressed with sentiments of gratitude, and I have endeavoured to devote myself to God afresh; to live, if spared on earth, more to his glory. My soul has been drawn out to him in prayer for grace to enable me to do so."

For more than six weeks Mr. Benson was unable to preach; but on the forenoon of February 13th, being in some degree restored to health, he preached at the City-road chapel, when he "was favoured with strength, both

of body and mind, and much liberty of speech." His subject was Rom. xv, 4. "I chose this text," says he, "partly with a view to establish the congregation in their faith in the certain truth and infinite importance of the Scriptures, in opposition to the infidel principles which have been so sedulously propagated of late in town and country."

This year he omitted to attend the conference, which was held in Liverpool, though affectionately invited by the president and secretary; alleging, among other reasons, that he was "not in so confirmed a state of health as to justify" him in "taking so long a journey as that from London to Liverpool would be."

July 30th he preached in the morning at Hinde-street chapel, and in the evening at City-road. His text at the latter place was Romans viii, 8, 9; when he observes: "I bless the Lord, that he strengthened me both in body and mind, and enabled me to bear a clear, and, I believe, a true and Scriptural testimony to the very important doctrine contained in the text."

October 29th, on his way to Hinde-street, where he had an appointment to preach, he was seized in Oxford-street with such a weakness in his legs, that, in order to prevent his falling, he was obliged to take hold of the rails before the houses. But, notwithstanding his great weakness, he, leaning on the arm of a friend, proceeded to the chapel; and having rested in the vestry till after the prayers were read, he found his strength so recruited that he was able to preach with liberty and comfort. His subject was Romans x, 4. On the morning of November 5th he walked to Gainsford-street, and preached; but on the two following Sundays he was confined to his house by affliction. November 26th, being a little better, he ventured to walk to Walworth; where, he says, he "was able to preach without difficulty, yea, with comfort and enlargement, from Phil. i, 9–11."

With this sermon he concluded his public ministry; a ministry in which he had been engaged for about half a century, and which had been sanctioned and blessed by the great Head of the church to the edification of thousands and tens of thousands of immortal souls. But it does not appear that he at all suspected that his public work was done; for two months subsequently, in a letter to Mr. Entwisle, he says: "I thank God, I have been greatly relieved, and enabled to go on regularly with my work in my study, as editor; but I am far from being perfectly restored, having, for several weeks, been very much distressed with a very afflictive cough, which has caused me to have sleepless nights, and has prevented my gaining strength. I hope, however, if it should please God to give us a little milder weather, so that I could get out, and take the benefit of the air, I shall gradually get quit of my cough, and obtain proper rest in sleep by night, which would greatly relieve me."

Mr. Benson's health had been declining for some time past. He was more or less affected with a cough, accompanied by fever, and occasionally was subject to faintings; and dropsical symptoms appeared in his hands and feet; but he continued to perform his full work, as editor, till within three weeks of his death. During his last illness he occasionally said: "I shall not be long here. How many have I known that are gone into eternity! Many more than I know upon earth." In his family devotions he often prayed with much fervour that he might have fortitude and resignation sufficient to bear his increasing afflictions; and though no longer able to preach, he endeavoured to be useful by his pen, even when, through extreme debility, it frequently fell from his hand.

Having visited one of his daughters, who was very ill, he said: "My love, I have been praying for you this morning. While in prayer, I was low and dejected; but

in walking here, I have been particularly comforted." He then spoke of her great affliction, and of the many deliverances which God had vouchsafed to her; bringing her to the borders of the grave, and then raising her up again. About a week after he paid her another visit; when he was so exhausted by the walk, as to be scarcely able to speak. Having recovered a little strength he said: "My dear, you are much in the way your mother was. I have been thinking much this morning of her restoration." And, after enlarging upon the subject, he said: "I have no doubt the Lord will restore you." He dwelt much upon being willing to suffer, as well as to do, the will of God.

December 28th, supposing her to be near death, he paid her another visit. Their conversation was affecting and profitable; turning upon the subject of total resignation, and that of Christians carrying their necessities before God in believing prayer. He spoke of the miracles of Christ, and encouraged her to believe in his power to restore her. He dwelt particularly on the resurrection of Lazarus, and on our Lord's words to Martha: "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" He afterward said to her: "Well, love, I do not know which of us will go first: I think that I shall." "O no! father," she replied, "I think I shall die first." He then said: "I have been much comforted in prayer respecting you, and have no doubt that God will comfort you after your time of trial;" and added, that she must exercise faith in the promises of God.

January 11th, 1821, at the earnest desire of Mr. Allan, he was taken in a coach to consult Dr. Baillie respecting his health. The doctor was of opinion that his complaint arose from a general disruption of his natural constitution, hastened by too close application to study, and too abste-

mious habits. He prescribed for him some tonic medicines, which, after a fortnight's trial, were found to be unproductive of any good effect. January 13th he mentioned to Mr. Bunting the necessity of his soon resigning his office as editor, and requested him immediately to undertake the publication of the remaining part of the "Christian Library." This Mr. Bunting engaged to do for him, until the ensuing conference should appoint his successor in the editorial department. Two days after, Mr. Atmore called to see him, and was much affected to find him so much depressed both in body and mind. That night he retired to bed in an extremely weak and feeble state, and appeared to have slept well till early in the morning, when he was seized with a fainting fit, which suspended the use of his animal functions. As soon as he became sensible, he with difficulty called for help, having before struggled without effect to help himself. He recovered, however, so far as to be able to sit up to breakfast; one of the family having assisted in dressing him that morning, for the first time during his illness.

January 27th Mr. and Mrs. Marsden visited him. "At first," says Mr. Marsden, "he appeared low; but he gradually revived. He said, that the only foundation on which he could rest was, 'By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.' He added, that he had been accustomed to examine himself daily, as to his motives, conduct, and the employment of his time; and he could say, that he had endeavoured to do the will of God; and that he had never sought money, or honour, or power. Speaking of his weakness, he remarked that it required great grace to be willing to be laid aside as a broken pitcher." Mrs. Marsden mentioned that nearly thirty years before this period, she had received her first lasting religious impressions under his ministry. He replied, "The former things are passed away." After a little time

spent in conversation, Mr. Marsden, at his request, prayed with him, and departed.

January 28th Mr. and Mrs. Bulmer called to see him; to whom he spoke very feelingly of the rapidity with which his strength had declined. "A little while ago," said he, "I could walk to Greenwich and back, to Deptford and back, to Hinde-street, to Chelsea and back, and preach; and feel as little fatigue on my return, as when I left home: now I can scarcely cross the room, or walk down stairs, without assistance! The change is sudden; but perhaps I boasted too much of my strength." It was observed, that when he enjoyed strength he had used it to good purpose; to which he replied: "It was indeed a ground of great satisfaction to him, that he had uniformly endeavoured to promote the glory of God and the good of souls; and though it was not the ground of his confidence, (for, said he, 'By grace we are saved,') yet he felt comfort from the consciousness, that from the commencement of his ministry, though sensible of much infirmity and imperfection, he had never been influenced by any sinister or private motive: had it been otherwise, he should have felt very uneasy now." The following day Mrs. Howden visited him, to whom he spoke without interruption for half an hour, on the best means of retaining justifying faith, and of growing in grace. These means, said he, were constant self-denial, taking up the daily cross, persevering prayer, and entire resignation to the divine will, exemplified by patience in suffering. At another time, when she mentioned to him the privilege which she, in common with thousands, had enjoyed, of sitting under his heart-searching ministry, he replied, it was now no more to him than if he had never preached one sermon. Mrs. Howden replied, that though it might be nothing in his eyes, yet that those who had been so much edified by his ministry, could not but be grateful to him as an instrument used by the God of

all grace to promote their spiritual interests; and though they could never claim any blessing on the ground of their own merit, yet God himself had said that they should be rewarded according to their works. To all this he briefly replied, "God will judge righteous judgment."

February 1st. Miss Wesley, who called upon him, says, respecting her visit: "It was very short, as I saw his weakness, and inclination to sleep. But he was perfectly himself, and looked composed and tranquil. He said it was a great satisfaction to him now, that he had glorified God in his youth; that he often thought of my dear father's last lines, written a short time before his departure: and he began to repeat them:—

'In age and feebleness extreme,
Who shall a sinful worm redeem?'

He then paused, as recollecting; and I added the following lines:—

'Jesus, my only hope thou art,
Strength of my failing flesh and heart;
O could I catch a smile from thee,
And drop into eternity!'

He appeared to take my visit very kindly. I reminded him of my father's attachment to him, of which he seemed to have a lively recollection."

February 5th, it being a very fine day, after having transacted some business with Mr. Cordeux, who generally came after breakfast to consult him respecting articles for the Magazines, and for which he yet provided copy, though it was within eleven days of his death; one of his daughters proposed a walk to him, which he accomplished with much difficulty. This was the last time he ever left his house. In the course of conversation with some friends in the afternoon, the question was proposed, whether a deviation from unreserved obedience would produce something like regret even in heaven. With great

solemnity, Mr. Benson said, "God accepts us not for our obedience, but for the sacrificial atonement of his Son: 'There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.' He will say, 'I do not condemn thee.'"

February 7th, in attempting to rise, between three and four o'clock in the morning, he fell, and so cut his head, that the wound bled much. From this time he became visibly weaker every day; and of this he was so sensible, that he said shortly after, he would never again attempt to rise without assistance, and that he should desire some one to sleep near him. February 8th Mr. Haslope visited him; and on inquiring how he felt, he said: "I thank God, I feel no pain either in body or mind." The following day he was so much worse as to be unable to get down stairs; but in the course of the day he said: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in the time of trouble." "We may assure ourselves that God does all things well. I am daily and hourly conscious of my own weakness. It is our duty to acquiesce in the will of God by patience and resignation. We are called not only to do but to suffer the will of God."

"In the afternoon," says Mr. Atmore, "he had considerable fever upon him, and his legs were greatly swelled. He was quite recollected. I said: 'Sir, we are poor creatures when God lays his hand upon us.' He replied, with great emphasis: 'Yes, when he toucheth us, he maketh us to consume away, like as a moth fretteth a garment.' I afterward said: 'I have a letter of yours, written fifty-five years ago, which I was reading the other day. What a mercy that you have been enabled to be faithful from that time to the present!' He said: 'As to my being faithful, I leave that to God: he will be my Judge. He knows that I have aimed at being faithful, and have served him in the simplicity of my heart.' I then said: 'Your only ground of consolation now is, not what you have done for

God, but what he has done for you.' He answered: 'I am saved by grace alone, through faith.' I then said: 'There is no other foundation than that which God hath laid in Zion.' He answered: 'No, there needs no other; that is quite sufficient.'"

Sunday, February 11th, he was almost wholly silent. The following day he was removed, though with great difficulty, at his own request, from his bed-room into his study, on the same floor. To his afflicted daughter he sent this message: "That she receive with patience, and resignation to the divine will, the present dispensation of God to us," (referring to himself and her,) "saying, Good is the will of the Lord." Having been unable for some time to pray with his family in the evening, that duty devolved on another member of it; but at the earnest entreaty of his children present, who thought it might be the last time they should hear him, this evening he added: "Answer the petitions which have now been offered up. May we confide in thy wisdom, and experience the influence of thy Spirit! May our hope be in thee! Prepare us for whatever thou hast prepared for us." These were the last words of prayer which he audibly expressed.

Tuesday, February 13th, apprehensions were entertained that he might expire in the course of the night; and hence, during the principal part of it, his family watched with him. They requested him, if possible, to express his present views concerning the faith he had maintained through life. His son John asked: "Do you now feel the virtue of that atonement which removes the sting of death? and can you say, 'I thank God through our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath given us the victory?'" He answered: "You know, John, these are the truths which I have testified for many years." "Then, father," he rejoined, "you know in whom you have believed, and are assured that he will keep that which you have committed to

him against that day?" He replied: "Yes." His eldest daughter said: "Do you not wish us to follow you, as you have followed Christ?" "Certainly," said he.*

After this interview some of the family retired to rest; but were called up about three o'clock, when, on account of his breathing more short and with greater difficulty, a speedy change was expected: but on taking some sago and wine, however, he revived a little.

February 14th, Dr. Clarke, Mr. Bunting, and Mr. Richard Smith visited him. Dr. Clarke, who appeared very much affected at seeing him, said: "You know me, sir?" He answered: "O yes,—it is Dr. Clarke." "Well, sir, you are not far from the kingdom of our God." He replied: "I am not only not far from the kingdom of our God, but I am sure of finding God in that kingdom. I am breaking very fast, and shall do so more and more." Dr. C. said: "You have an all-sufficient and almighty Saviour; and you now maintain your trust in him." He replied: "Yes." The doctor then prayed with him; after which he said: "You feel the power of those great truths which you have for so many years fully declared to us: we have not followed a cunningly devised fable." He answered: "No —no: I have no hope of being saved but by grace through faith. I still feel the need of the renewing influences of

* However desirable or satisfactory it may be to survivors to hear from the dying lips of their departing friends testimonies in favour of the power of religion, and of their personal interests in the blood of the atonement; yet, considering how difficult it must be for persons who are struggling in the agonies of death, to give utterance to any thing like coherent conversation, questions ought to be sparingly put to them. To such a man as Joseph Benson, whose whole life was devoted to the service of Christ, to put searching interrogations concerning the state of his mind, as if any doubt could be entertained concerning his final happiness, does seem superfluous and unnecessary. Men generally die as they have lived; and concerning every truly pious man it may be said,

"His God will not forsake him in his final hour,
His final hour brings glory to his God."

his Holy Spirit." To Mr. Bunting he said: "I am very weak,—I feel my infirmities; I feel that I have no sufficiency for any thing good in myself." He observed also: "I consider that we must not only be pardoned and accepted through Christ, but also for his sake, and by his Spirit, be fully renewed, and made partakers of the divine nature." Mr. Bunting replied: "You now realize the great truths you have so frequently pressed upon us." He answered: "Yes!—O yes!"

February 15th Mr. Marsden, after praying with him, said: "The Lord has long been your refuge, and he will be with you and bless you." He replied: "I trust he has, and he will." And on the remark being made, that he should be with his God, to behold his glory, and to be a partaker of it, he said: "I trust I shall." This night he was more wakeful than usual, but too weak to express himself on any subject; but his mind appeared to be occupied with divine things.

February 16th, in the morning, when asked how he felt himself, he said: "I think I am as I have been all the week." After taking some tea he was seized with a general tremor, which was succeeded by very difficult respiration, with a noise in his throat. This continued, with little abatement, till near his death. His eyes, before so clear, and capable of bearing a strong light, now became dim, his mouth dry, and his countenance more pallid. When his mouth was moistened with some liquid, his breathing was almost suspended. About seven o'clock in the evening he began to breathe more gently and regularly; and it was evident that he was near his end. His children stood in awful silence, expecting the event. Having kneeled down, they continued in silent prayer for some minutes; after which they commended his departing spirit into the hands of its faithful Creator. A little after, his breathing ceased for some minutes, but again returned

with a gentle and gradually decreasing tone, till at length he imperceptibly expired.

His mortal remains were interred in the ground adjoining to the City-road chapel, on Thursday, February 22d, 1821. The trustees of that chapel had kindly expressed a wish that they should be deposited in Mr. Wesley's tomb, as a token of respect for so distinguished a man; but his relatives naturally preferred his own family grave. About twelve o'clock the corpse was brought into the chapel, and placed before the pulpit, preceded by Messrs. Bunting and Marsden, the president and secretary of the conference; and by Dr. Clarke, Dr. Hamilton, and Mr. Vasey; and followed by the relatives of the deceased, by twenty-four travelling preachers, by about twenty gentlemen, the personal friends of the deceased, and a large number of local preachers, stewards, and other members of the society from different parts of London. Mr. Bunting conducted the usual service both in the chapel and at the grave. Dr. Clarke delivered an address to the people assembled on the occasion, in which he gave a most honourable testimony to the deceased as a sound scholar, a profound theologian, and an able and a powerful preacher. Friday, March 2d, a day memorable to the Methodists, being the anniversary of Mr. Wesley's death, Mr. Bunting preached a funeral sermon on 1 Corinthians xv, 29. The event also was improved in most of the other Methodist chapels in London, on Sunday, March 4th; and most of the congregations testified their respect to Mr. Benson's memory by appearing in mourning.

On his coffin, upon a large brass plate, is the following inscription:—

JOSEPHUS BENSON,
JESU CHRISTI ECCLESIASTES,
OB. 16 FEBRUARII, A. D. 1821,
ANNO ÆTATIS 74.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHARACTER OF JOSEPH BENSON.

Observations on biography—Of Mr. Benson's intellectual powers—His learning—Warm and ardent in his temper—Grave and serious in his deportment—A great economist of time—Of his disinterestedness—His compassion toward others—Love to his children—Dr. Bunting's description of him—Mr. Kruse's account of a sermon of his at City-road chapel—His preaching at Saffron-hill and Clerkenwell-green—His pastoral character—Love for Sunday schools—Chosen president of the Missionary Society—Hartwell Horne's opinion of his Commentary.

To delineate with accuracy the intellectual and physical features of any individual, is attended with considerable difficulty. For though all beings of the human species are essentially similar, yet such is the inconceivable variety in the works of God, that every man in his physical structure and mental capabilities possesses a character peculiarly and exclusively his own. But the shades of difference in human beings are frequently so minute and almost imperceptible as to defy delineation. And the difficulty of description is proportionably great, as the object rises in moral grandeur above the ordinary rank of mortals. Common and every-day things can be portrayed in familiar and colloquial language. But to describe a great character—a man of an enlarged mind, and of lofty intellectual powers—requires talents of a superior order. And here the writer feels his inadequacy for the complete discharge of the duty imposed upon him. He did not make choice of it himself; nor would he have undertaken to furnish for the public Memoirs of the Rev. Joseph Benson, had not many of the materials been made ready to his hand.

That Mr. Benson was an extraordinary character, all who were honoured with his acquaintance and confidence

will readily allow. He was unquestionably a man of a strong mind, and of a comprehensive grasp of understanding; and his diligence in seeking improvement has been seldom equalled, and scarcely ever surpassed. From his youth, and through all the subsequent periods of his life, he pursued his studies with undeviating perseverance. In the acquisition of knowledge he cheerfully sacrificed the love of ease, and made his time and opportunities tributary to this predominant and commendable object. With the dead languages he was very familiar; and so frequently and carefully had he perused the Greek Testament, that he could repeat, verbatim, nearly every passage it contains. With the Hebrew also of the Old Testament he was well acquainted, having read it attentively several times. But while he made the Bible his chief study, he did not neglect to read the justly celebrated writings of antiquity, nor such modern works as he deemed merited a perusal. After he first found in Mr. Wesley's library at Newcastle a copy of Homer's Iliad, he applied himself so closely to it, as to read a book each day. He accustomed himself to note down every particular word as it occurred, with its derivation and meaning, interspersed with short critical remarks. He likewise followed this practice while reading some books of Xenophon, Plato's Dialogues, and certain other authors. With the works of the best English poets, especially with Dr. Young, to whose writings he was peculiarly partial, and with the works of philosophers and historians, he was also well acquainted.

He was constitutionally warm and ardent in his natural temper; and though he carefully studied to regulate and subdue it, yet it was not unfrequently a source of pain and grief to him, when he thought he had on any occasion betrayed an undue degree of indulgence of it. But his most intimate friends can testify, that it was only what he conceived to be seriously wrong that excited his displeasure,

and that led him to express his feelings in a tone of severe reprehension. In his bosom anger found no resting place.

Though his temper was sanguine, it was no less conspicuous for gravity and seriousness. To foolish talking and jesting he evinced no disposition; and against ebullitions of frantic mirth he had an unconquerable abhorrence. Corrupt conversation never proceeded out of his mouth: his speech was always with grace, seasoned with salt, and eminently calculated to minister grace to the hearers.

Of time he was a great economist. In preaching from "Redeeming the time," he was accustomed to repeat with great emphasis the lines of his favourite poet:—

> "Time is eternity,
> Pregnant with all eternity can give;
> Pregnant with all that makes archangels smile;
> Who murders time, he crushes in the birth
> A power ethereal, only not adored."

"Often," says Mr. Entwisle, "while I lived near him in City-road, did his diligence speak loudly to me. At night, so late as eleven o'clock, his light was unextinguished; and at five in the morning he was found in his study again. This was uniformly the case; and while I often observed it from my own room, I admired his conduct, and felt a desire to imitate him as far as practicable."

He was also a remarkable example of disinterestedness. Selfishness was alien from his character. His labours, as the editor of our periodicals, were abundant. The Methodist Magazine was doubled in its size during his continuance in that office. And for a series of years he published another work, entitled, "The Youth's Instructer and Guardian." He edited an octavo edition of Wesley's Works, in seventeen volumes; and an edition of Fletcher's Works, in nine volumes of the same size. He also edited eleven volumes of the Christian Library, and many other works. And in the course of his editorship, he

wrote and published the Life of the Rev. John Fletcher, besides various sermons. And above all, he has left, as a valuable legacy to posterity, his voluminous and standard Commentary on the Holy Scriptures. And yet, notwithstanding the extraordinary tasks which he imposed upon himself, and performed with the greatest diligence and care, he absolutely refused the least remuneration; and when the conference at Manchester, in 1815, voted him £500, not as a reward for his labours, but as a mark of their approbation, no entreaties could prevail with him to accept either the whole or any part of that sum.

But while he maintained a spirit of noble disinterestedness in reference to himself, he cultivated the tenderest compassion toward others. He not only contributed of his substance, as he had opportunity, to the poor of Christ's flock, but he was often melted into tears while pleading the cause of the indigent and afflicted. "There was nothing by which tenderness of spirit appeared so soon and so powerfully excited in him, as by tales of wo and privation." How has his heart been affected while reading those cases of distress which it is usual to bring forward at the annual appeal made in all our chapels in London, on behalf of the "Strangers' Friend Society!"—a charity which owed much to his powerful advocacy and influence; especially during the earlier period of his residence in the metropolis, when he was the superintendent of the London circuit.

And while Mr. Benson was engaged in the walks of usefulness abroad, he was not unmindful of his more private duties at home. The affairs of his family claimed a large share of his sincere regard and affectionate solicitude. As a master, he forebore threatening; and he not only cared for the souls of his servants, but when one of them was rendered incapable, through severe illness, of performing the domestic duties of her station, he was so

far from treating her with indifference, that he allowed one of his daughters to wait upon her, though her doing so was at the expense of bringing home another who had been attending upon her afflicted sister. As a father, the spiritual welfare of his children lay near his heart. He set them an example of holy living, worthy of their devout and diligent imitation; and he instructed them not only in classical learning, but in the doctrines and duties of Christianity. Solicitous as he was that his sons should be scholars, yet he was infinitely more concerned that they should be Christians. "He delighted to explain the Scriptures to them, while he taught them those holy oracles in the languages in which they were written, or while they were read in the course of family worship, or became the subject of conversation, when sitting a little while with his family in the evening: and, by all that argument, authority, and example could effect, he assiduously inculcated upon them the elevated principles and holy duties of Christianity, with many rules for the regulation of life, economy of time and expense, and diligence in their providential callings." To one of his sons, who was pursuing his studies at college, he thus writes:—

"My Dear Son,—Although I can ill spare time, I must write a few lines to inquire after your health, and how you go on in your studies. I am glad you are to be examined in the evidences of Christianity. It is certainly of infinite importance that you should understand them, and be well convinced that the grounds of your faith are solid, and such as will support all the weight you can lay upon them. But if in the mean time you should cease to build on that ground, and lose any measure of the religion you possessed, it would be a bad affair, and defeat the very design you had in view in going to the university. And yet I am not without my fears, lest your young and inexperienced mind

should be led astray by the acquaintances you may form. You need to have, and you must have, no intimacy with those who fear not God. If I thought that you formed intimacies of that kind, it would induce me to withdraw you from Cambridge, because it would be a certain sign that you had not true religion; and I am sure that a person without true religion can never be called to the ministry of the gospel."

To the same son, under the date of April 4th, 1804, he thus writes:—"I hope you will continue to rise early: but you should not fail to go to bed at a proper time in the evening, which should be between nine and ten o'clock. And you must not suffer yourself to be deprived of your time during the day by a set of idlers, who, having nothing to do themselves, or no inclination to their own proper business, make no conscience of hindering that of others. This may require some address, that you may not appear uncivil; and it will require much resolution. But remember, you had better offend many worthless loungers, than suffer yourself to be robbed of your precious time, and prevented from making that improvement you might otherwise make. I beseech you attend to this; for on this much depends."

In a subsequent letter he thus writes: "You are busy, and I am busy. And it is very well. It is more for our happiness, than if we had too much leisure. I am of Dr. Young's mind:

> 'Leisure is pain; takes off our chariot wheels;
> How heavily we drag the load of life!
> Blest leisure is our curse, like that of Cain;
> It makes us wander, wander earth around,
> To fly the tyrant thought.—
> Without employ,
> The soul is on the rack, the rack of rest,
> To souls most adverse; action all their joys.'"

In the last letter he wrote to his son he says: "Remember, the great point is, that we be holy and useful in our generation; for we are not to live unto ourselves, but to Him who died for us, and rose again. Let us always keep eternity in view, and see that we are always ready to enter it.

"In reference to his personal character, as a Christian, the following observations," says Dr. Bunting, "have occurred to my mind:—

"His conversion from sin to God was clear, sound, and decided. *Conviction* of actual sin, of the natural depravity which is its source, of the moral helplessness which is its concomitant, and of the awful exposure to divine wrath, and endless ruin, which is its effect:—*godly sorrow*, the result of this conviction, working repentance toward God, with earnest prayer for pardon and grace, and other fruits meet for such repentance:—*faith*, in the testimony of the gospel concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him, as declared in that testimony, to be the only and the all-sufficient Saviour of sinners, able and willing, by his atoning blood, and almighty Spirit, to save unto the uttermost those who are 'without money or price,' without merit or might of their own:—and, finally, in consequence of this act of faith in Christ as 'the Lord our righteousness,' *the reception into the heart of the promised Spirit*, both as 'the Comforter,' witnessing to the believer his pardon, and adoption into God's family, and thereby filling him with a peace which passeth understanding, and as a Sanctifier, working in him a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness, which are evidenced by habitual holiness of heart and life. From this conversion flowed all his subsequent excellence as a Christian: it was this 'grace of God, bringing salvation,' that in fact made him a Christian, planted in him the elements of all Christian virtues, and prepared him for every good word and work.

"And the grace he thus received he habitually retained; and in it he increased with the increase of God. He rested not in first principles or rudiments of Christian doctrine or experience, but went on unto perfection, walking in Christ whom he had received, and fighting the good fight; and he was found, as we trust and believe, in the possession of that entire 'sanctification of the Spirit' on which he so often strongly insisted, as essential to our final salvation. For a considerable period, indeed, his finished preparation for a better country, that is, a heavenly, was manifest to all who knew him. He often spoke in strong terms of the spiritual benefit which he had lately derived from preparing for the press the earlier volumes of the Christian Library: and it was very apparent from his conversation, that the reperusal of that excellent collection of experimental and practical divinity had been greatly blessed to his own soul.

"In looking at what I conceive to have been the peculiar characteristics of Mr. Benson's personal piety, I cannot but particularize the advantage which it derived, as to its stability, its beautiful uniformity, and its general efficiency, from his having so carefully studied, in reference to his own interest in them, the evidences and doctrines of divine revelation. In these branches of religious knowledge, his understanding was thoroughly cultivated and well principled. He knew why, as well as 'in whom,' he had believed; and thus laid the foundation for a remarkably firm and unshaken confidence in the word, the grace, and the providence of God, which, sustained by divine influence and power, was to his soul like an anchor true and steadfast, and almost set at defiance all the subtlety and force of temptation on such subjects. Of him it might eminently be said, 'In understanding he was *a man*.' This gave a corresponding manliness and vigour to his piety in general; and having become habitual, perhaps influenced,

in part, the tone of his feelings and conversation in his last sickness, which was that of strong faith, rather than of strong excitement, and exhibited most prominently a calm, settled, and tranquil confidence in a Saviour, on whose merits, might, and faithfulness he had long reposed such implicit reliance, that he never thought of doubting their continued exercise in his favour. On one point connected with this article, Mr. Benson was wont to express his opinion with peculiar decision; I mean, the propriety and necessity, in these days of rebuke and blasphemy, of fortifying the minds of young people, and of Christians in general, against the assaults of infidelity, by an accurate acquaintance with the evidences, external as well as internal, of our holy religion. And he was always equally decided, as to the apostacies from religious profession, and other mischievous consequences, which result in very many cases from neglecting to inform the judgments of persons who appear to be the subjects of divine awakenings, or of other gracious and hopeful affections, and from their want of more careful instruction in Christian doctrines and duties. On this principle, he strenuously enforced on all Christians the perusal of the Holy Scriptures; and recommended *catechetical labours* to parents and other teachers of the young, as essential to permanent success.

"Mr. Benson was distinguished by remarkably strong and realizing impressions of the eternal world, of the brevity and uncertainty of time, and of the insignificance of those things which are seen and temporal, except as they stand in connection with the things unseen and eternal. I think I have met with no man who appeared so powerfully to feel, and who so affectingly described, the supreme importance of that everlasting state to which we are hastening. Whether he was ever a close student of the practical works of the great Richard Baxter, I have no means of ascertaining; but he strikingly resembled, in this particu-

lar, that extraordinary man, and invaluable writer, who pre-eminently lived and acted under the feeling, that he was 'a dying man among dying men.' From these lively apprehensions of eternity resulted, by the divine blessing, Mr. Benson's holy deadness to this world, in which he greatly excelled, and has left to all who knew him a most illustrious example. Like 'the spirits late escaped from earth,' he, even while yet among us, seemed to have 'the truth of things full blazing on his eye;' and 'looked astonished on the ways of men, whose life's whole drift is to forget their graves.' To love this world, so as to seek, supremely or anxiously, its transitory honours, or pleasures, or wealth, appeared to him a thing, not only injurious, but absolutely ridiculous; and I have sometimes seen him ready at once to laugh at the absurdity of such conduct, and to weep over its criminality and danger. And by his own habitual self-denial,—his mortified life,—his extraordinary disinterestedness,—and his abstinence from every thing like greediness of filthy lucre, or making, in any mean or dishonourable sense, a gain of godliness, and of his influence in the church of Christ, for himself or for his family,—he evinced the sincerity of those feelings to which he often gave utterance in reference to these subjects.

"Mr. Benson was eminent in that important part of purity of heart which consists in simplicity of intention. He often urged on others, and, by special prayer and frequent self-examination, endeavoured to cultivate in himself, a constant regard to the authority of God, and a supreme desire to please and glorify him, in the whole conduct of life. In this endeavour, there is reason to believe, he was greatly succeeded by the Holy Spirit; so that his brethren, if ever they allowed themselves humbly to think that he was, when he differed from them on any matter of public business, erroneous in judgment, gave him implicit credit

for singleness of eye, and never reverenced him more unfeignedly than when they felt themselves compelled to dissent, in any instance, from his conclusions or recommendations. No man, perhaps, exercised a more general, or a more deserved and beneficial, influence over his friends and associates; because every one who knew him was satisfied of his unimpeachable integrity, and universal conscientiousness.

"I shall only mention further, in speaking of his Christian character, the unfeigned humility which, I believe, was habitual to his mind, and crowned all his other graces. His attainments, intellectual and moral, were of no common order: but that was a fact on which, as far as I could observe, he never appeared to allow himself to dwell; and of which, indeed, in reference to his religious eminence, I never could discover any indication that he was himself conscious. His views of the divine purity and justice were peculiarly solemn, and perhaps somewhat awful in their effect, on his habitual feeling toward God, though tempered and softened by his steadfast faith in the discoveries and provisions of the gospel. Hence he compared himself with the highest and the holiest standards; and might, of course, be sensible of many deficiencies which others of views less strict, and habits less rigidly conscientious, would have overlooked in themselves. One thing is certain,—that in life and death he had no plea on which he dared, or was disposed, to rely for acceptance, and right to life, but the merits of the Saviour's blood, and the gracious promises of the new covenant. At the close of his signally useful life, and after a ministry of fifty years, honoured with a visible and manifest success not often paralleled, he repeatedly and emphatically declared to me: 'I am saved by grace only, through faith.' Thus he looked for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

"In reference to the public character of Mr. Benson, as a minister of Christ, I deem it necessary to mention the following particulars:—

"He was 'a scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven,' and able to 'bring forth out of his treasure things new and old.' Of him it may be truly said, that he was 'mighty in the Scriptures;' with which, in their original languages, he was familiarly conversant. With the Greek Testament, especially, he was accurately acquainted. He frequently quoted it, even in social conversations, on subjects of divinity; and often happily availed himself, in the pulpit, of the illustrations suggested to him by his critical knowledge of its peculiar beauties and idioms. He was well skilled in every branch of systematic and polemical theology. His opinions were the same, on all great doctrinal questions, with those which are well known as characterizing the living ministry and printed works of Mr. Wesley and Mr. Fletcher. These he firmly believed to be revealed in the Holy Scriptures; and for the authority of that volume, convinced as he was of its divinity and inspiration, he had a profound reverence. Its testimony, once ascertained, he allowed not himself, for a moment, to question or to modify. He viewed it as 'the judgment of God's mouth;' and had acquired the all-important habit of bowing at once to its decisions. The tribute so honourably paid in this place, by Dr. Adam Clarke, on the day of his interment, to his pre-eminence as a profound and able divine, I have heard in terms equally strong and unqualified, from the lips of no incompetent judges, who do not belong to our own connection. One of his excellences, as a theologian, is well described in the following extract of a letter from an aged minister in our body,—himself known to his intimate friends as distinguished by the strict and discriminating accuracy of his theological views:—'He had a mind capable of embracing the whole analogy

of faith, and at the same time of minutely analyzing it. He readily discerned where truth, pushed beyond its proper limits, verged on error. At the same time, his heart, influenced by the Holy Spirit, received the truth in all its power; so that it became in him a living and operative principle. Hence his expositions of the Scriptures were clear, distinct, and full, while his applications to the consciences and hearts of his hearers were powerfully, and sometimes irresistibly impressive, and reminded me often of the most pointed parts in the works of Richard Baxter. He was indeed a burning and a shining light.'

"Mr. Benson, as a *preacher*, had perhaps fewer faults, and more excellences, than ordinarily fall to the lot of one servant of Christ, however gifted. His ministry of the word was soundly evangelical, but guarded against Antinomian perversions of the gospel with a remarkable degree of anxiety, for which the part he bore in early life, in transactions connected with certain theological controversies, will naturally account; and which the tendency even yet discoverable, in some part of the professing world, to run into such perversions, may go far to justify. Christ should be preached boldly and freely; but he should also be preached fully and consistently, in all his offices; as a Saviour from sin, as well as from hell. His ministry was Scriptural; not metaphysically subtle, nor modishly sentimental. His subjects, arguments, and illustrations, were all derived from the book of which he was called to be the expounder to his hearers: and even among Scriptural topics, he was religiously scrupulous to select those which were most important, and most suited to the state and necessities of the people. His ministry was, as to its manner, plain, but dignified. He paid little attention to the mere graces and elegances of style: but he was powerfully argumentative in his addresses to the understanding; and often, as you have heard, irresistibly energetic in his appeals to the

conscience. 'Knowing the terror of the Lord,' he persuaded men to repentance; and could most instructively and delightfully dilate, for the comfort of penitents and the edification of believers, on the glory of God, as seen in the face of Jesus Christ, and the unsearchable riches of wisdom and goodness displayed in the scheme of the gospel. Here he never failed to discover the powers of a master in the sacred art; and, what was still better, 'the unction of the Holy One,' which rested on him and on his auditories, was often overwhelmingly glorious; and the word of God, dispensed by him, was 'as a fire, and as a hammer which breaketh the rock in pieces.' In these characteristics of his preaching, Mr. Benson had no superior, and few equals. And the happy effect of such a ministry has, I believe, been great, not only on the people, but also on the body of our younger preachers, who, when they have sat with admiration and delight under his sermons at our annual conferences, have practically learned in what the real greatness of a preacher of the gospel consists,—have been led to imitate, though without servility, what God so signally owned in the man they honoured,—and have thus been guarded against substituting, in their own ministry, the chaff for the wheat, the tinsel for the gold, the miserable trappings of an empty and artificial oratory for that Scriptural truth, which is 'when unadorned adorned the most,' and that genuine eloquence which is inspired by pious feeling, and zeal for the salvation of perishing souls."

To the preceding account of Mr. Benson's talents as a preacher, furnished by the Rev. Dr. Bunting, I have the pleasure of adding the following graphic description from the pen of Mr. Peter Kruse. He says: "Some years since, I was invited to attend the public service at City-road chapel in London: the time was Sunday evening: and the minister appointed to preach was said to be popu-

lar. The building was crowded to excess; and just as the clock struck six, all eyes were directed toward the passage leading from what is termed the morning chapel, through which the minister proceeded from the vestry. Having heard of his pulpit talent, and consequent celebrity, my imagination had pictured the idea of an erect and portly personage, rustling to the scene of action with a full measure of clerical dignity; when, to my surprise and disappointment, came forward, with solemn pace, a spare unassuming figure, habited in a straight-fronted black coat, of the plainest form. There appeared in him an inward lowliness, which I thought remarkable; his countenance was composed and placid, and of that cast which indicated deep thinking; he was about the medium height; had a small stoop in walking; and from the few straggling hairs which yet barely lingered on his forehead, he must have been advancing in years. On ascending the pulpit, my first impression was, that the congregation was disappointed. The favourite, thought I, is not come: this person is the deputy; and I wonder what such a teacher can have to say. 'Judge nothing before the time,' was the wise reply of my friend. I consented, therefore, to hear with patience; or, at least, to try. On giving out the hymn which was to be sung, I found the minister had the disadvantage of a voice by no means musical, and exceedingly weak withal. The prayer which followed was delivered in a tone rather low; but it was remarkable for its comprehensiveness and spirituality. In pronouncing the text of Scripture on which the discourse was to be founded, it was with some difficulty that he was heard, especially at the more distant part of his audience, where I happened to be. With the exception of a few notes, written upon a small piece of paper, placed before him on the opened leaf of the Bible, his sermon was extemporaneous; and the utterance of a few sentences was sufficient to show that

he was no ordinary man. The exordium was finely conceived, and was delivered with a clear and distinct voice, and with an earnestness of manner, which visibly increased as he proceeded. The structure of the sermon, and his intended line of remark and reasoning, were then propounded with remarkable perspicuity; and for a full hour, which was the time the exposition lasted, not fewer than two thousand persons listened with almost breathless attention to this master in Israel. But beautiful and impressive as was the manner in which the argumentative parts of the discourse were sustained, it was toward the close that the peculiarities of this marvellous man were exhibited. If the most difficult part of a sermon be the application, it was here that he conspicuously shone. Supernatural aid seemed to come down: out of weakness, he was made strong: the disadvantage of a weak and tremulous voice was forgotten in overwhelming appeals to the consciences of the auditors. They seemed to expect an approaching storm; all bent a willing ear: and sure enough it came. On this occasion, the preacher made a tremendous calculation of the requisitions of the moral law, and the penalties attached to disobedience. There were blackness, and darkness, and tempest. Sinai was altogether on a smoke, and great searchings of heart arose, as when of old the trumpet sounded long and waxed loud, and the people did exceedingly fear and quake. Then, by a transition of thought, managed with singular ability, the terrors of the last day were surveyed: the Ancient of days did sit; the books were opened; creation crashed to its centre, and was passing away with a great noise; the inexorable throne was unveiled, and before it stood the cited dead of a thousand generations. The condition of those who perish in an impenitent rejection of the gospel was then portrayed in colours vivid as the light of truth: guilt stood impeached and abashed; subterfuge and evasion

were driven from their last retreat; forgotten sins seemed to be remembered, and, like the prophetic roll, were exhibited in characters of mourning, lamentation, and wo. 'See,' said the preacher, 'that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.' This, and other passages of sacred writ, were quoted in the utmost height of excited fervour: when, as was commonly the case with him, his voice partially failed, and gave way before the fulness of his spirit; but this circumstance, so far from impeding the current of his eloquence, rendered it increasingly touching. Every one saw that he was big with matter, and that the 'spirit of convincing speech' was with him. There was no failure but that of corporeal strength. Many were deeply smitten, some sorrowed after a godly sort, and not a few were melted into tears: when, with the skill of the physician who knew his time when to probe, and when to stay his hand, the preacher turned to another leaf in his commission; and the promises of the gospel, of which he had an ample store at his command, were announced with charming pathos and freedom. The perspiration had for some time stood in drops upon his forehead, which he repeatedly removed with his handkerchief: meantime the hearers remained mute with attention,—you might have heard a sigh. The entrance of the word seemed to give life. There came on a lifting up of the head, as if redemption drew nigh. The expectation of some spiritual blessing was tremblingly alive; as in the year when King Uzziah died, when the door-posts were shaken at the presence of the Lord. All felt the manifestation of power and the present God; as when Moses smote the rock, amidst multitudes pressing around to catch the gushing stream. The preacher, as was usual with him, concluded with a short aspiration of prayer, which was

instantly followed by an *Amen*,—deep, subdued, and prolonged; and which, as the voice of many waters, arose from all parts of the chapel. The effect was singularly touching. It has been asserted that the ministry of this extraordinary man had been of special spiritual use to no fewer than ten thousand persons; among whom, and by the Wesleyan community in general, the name of Joseph Benson will not soon be forgotten.

"Mr. Benson's career as a public expounder of God's word, if not altogether unique, was singular in respect of several material points. Speakers endued with less self-possession than he, are, it is said, sometimes overpowered by the presence of an overflowing assembly. Not so with the gifted man now alluded to: he rose in proportion to the demand upon his energies. As a general rule, the larger the congregation, the more acceptable it appeared to be; especially if to numbers were added a silent devout attitude, and a desire to apprehend and receive his meaning. On such occasions, when a mass of listeners seemed to have but one desire, and were 'all eye, and all ear' to learn the truth, his spirit, like that of the great apostle, was stirred within him; grace descended like dew upon the hill of Hermon. There was a noise, and, behold, a shaking, and the dry bones lived.

"Sometimes, when advancing toward the close of a discourse, Mr. Benson selected a particular class of persons, frequently young men, into whose practice he had reason to believe some gay and fashionable vice had insinuated itself. For such a scrutiny he was well qualified, by an intimacy with a tolerably large circle of acquaintance, which had grown up around him, during his lengthened residence, as the literary director of the Wesleyan book department. On these occasions, the skill and tact of the preacher were shown in a nice and delicate perception of right and wrong; in defining the boundaries of vice and

virtue; in taking or tearing away the mask so often worn by mischief in disguise; and by a simple but luminous display of evangelical doctrine and precept, as the only availing remedy for moral evil. That these personal appeals (for they almost amounted to it) were occasionally painful, there can be no doubt; and that some who were present wished themselves away, is known; for conscience would be heard; but it is not known that any took offence: indeed, there was in Mr. Benson's addresses so much kindness, combined with such force of reasoning,—such a desire to convince the judgment, and save the soul,—that to take deliberate umbrage seemed almost impossible.

"Although Mr. Benson appeared to be in his proper element while holding forth the word of life to large congregations, it must not be understood that he thought or acted lightly in reference to those small, and comparatively out-of-the-way, places in which Wesleyan Methodism sometimes has a beginning. He understood the importance of such places too well, to allow of any approach to indifference concerning them. He was, in fact, remarkable for a conscientious adherence to his appointment on the plan; whether the dimensions of the place to which he was appointed were great or small. The marked, careful, consecutive attention which he paid to the ministration of the word in destitute and neglected neighbourhoods, especially on the week-day evenings, is well worthy of notice and imitation. On these occasions, when the auditory consisted chiefly of working persons, just retired from daily labour, his practice generally was, to read several verses, or take an entire chapter of holy writ, as a text, and go through it in an expository form. The excellence of this method, as he managed it, can scarcely be conceived, except by those who heard him: it was no doubt chosen, as best suited to meet the capacity of those plain and unlettered persons who left the world to pray and hear.

Many were thus impressed by a single weighty sentence, whose faculties were unequal to the task of pursuing the train of thought and reasoning of a discourse framed and divided into heads in the usual manner.

"This kind-hearted supervision with regard to the 'small and feeble things' of that early day was doubtless displayed in instances never likely to be known; but one or two such cases are worthy of being recorded. The Methodists have had for many years a preaching-place, or chapel, on Saffron-hill, in the centre of London. The locality is notorious as the abode of a numerous low Irish population, chiefly employed as venders of provisions, or masons' labourers. The chapel is placed behind a range of houses, and is approached through a narrow covered entrance, or passage, from the street, having no pretensions to architectural embellishment, or even convenience. But this place of worship, in spite of these deductions, has always been considered respectable. God has blessed it: sinners have been taught the way of truth within its walls; and where the divine presence is felt, a barn, an outhouse, or a hovel may be entered without reluctance or shame. It will easily be credited, that in this place Mr. Benson was popular,—so was Dr. Clarke: and this statement may serve to show that in Methodism, while assembled multitudes are fed with the bread of life, there is a careful and heartfelt superintendence practised whenever and wherever 'two or three are met together' in the name of Christ.

"Another infant cause to which the fostering care of Mr. Benson directed itself was situated in Clerkenwell-green. The place of worship here was a school-room, and on the first floor of the house. A person, now living, well remembers him on one occasion, when he selected the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans for his subject, and went through the whole of the chapter, verse

after verse, with an exactness of observation, and an earnestness of manner, that were truly edifying. The pains he took to give what he deemed to be the right meaning of every sentence and word, and the labour he encountered in order to make himself understood, are well remembered. 'The preacher sought to find out acceptable words, even words of truth.' The man who knew how to find the low level of Saffron-hill and Clerkenwell-green, knew also, when occasion demanded, how to send forth the polished shaft of truth, with unerring aim, among the well-dressed hearers in the cushioned pews of a more elegant and capacious chapel."

Mr. Benson was also a pastoral man. It was not in the pulpit alone that he strove to win souls to Christ, and to build up believers in their most holy faith; but, as far as his other duties would allow, he visited the sick, and ministered to the temporal and spiritual necessities of the poor of Christ's flock. When called upon to preside at the quarterly visitation of the classes, for receiving their tickets, his manner was singularly impressive. Being such a one as "Paul the aged," though another in name, his spiritual instructions and admonitions were enforced by long and varied experience in the ways of God; and having obtained an intimate acquaintance with the members of the society, through his long continuance in the metropolis, he was enabled to adapt himself to the peculiarities of their several cases. In this department of usefulness, which is known to be emphatically and almost exclusively Wesleyan, he took more than ordinary pains. Exact, though not formal, and searching without being inquisitive, he endeavoured to ascertain the spiritual state and religious experience of the several members of the society, that he might counsel or comfort them as their circumstances required. The whole process was kindly familiar and colloquial, and managed, on the part of the pastor, with a

fixed determination to benefit the flock; and while the best feelings of the heart were excited, the most valuable instructions on the great verities of Christianity were communicated. It must be admitted, that these social services occupied a considerable portion of time; and it is questionable whether, in the present more advanced period of incessant ministerial engagement, sufficient leisure can be found for quarterly visitations so extended; and yet, under Mr. Benson's judicious management, the value of such seasons can scarcely be questioned. The time thus occupied was not tedious, nor was it ever thought so, except by superficial people. His diffusiveness consisted not in saying the same thing in varied phrase, but in the communication of new and interesting remarks. Originality is, without doubt, far less common than many persons imagine; old things are often habited in a new garb; and much of that which is novel in appearance is antiquated in reality: but Mr. Benson, like a thoroughly instructed scribe, brought out of his treasure things new and old. His remarks were always based on a solid foundation, and were generally so framed as to make the hearer think for himself. A class, composed almost entirely of young men, who have now nearly grown gray, were deeply indebted to the sage advices of this eminent man. They were accustomed to meet at six o'clock on the Lord's-day mornings, in an apartment connected with the old book-room in the City-road chapel-yard. Several members of that class have arisen to stations of usefulness in the Wesleyan body; and one young man, whose name stood for some time on that class-paper, is now a popular and very useful minister of one of the largest Dissenting chapels in the metropolis.

The appointment of Mr. Benson to a public situation at City-road chapel was also of great and permanent advantage in reference to Sunday-school exertions, which, at the

commencement of the present century, were but imperfectly understood. Wholly unpractised and inexperienced as the London Methodists were at that time in the art of religiously teaching large masses of children, ministerial co-operation, at all times valuable, was then indispensably necessary. It was required not only for the public advocacy of these institutions, on annual occasions, when appeals from the pulpit called forth congregational liberality, but by the more laborious and less agreeable duty of presiding at committees, called together at oft-recurring and inconvenient seasons, and whose supervision was needed on every point of general management. In the prosecution of these duties Mr. Benson's services were peculiarly beneficial. It is true, he was not a teacher of children,—that was not his province: he was more,—he taught those who taught them: he guided the committees in their principal movements; devised methods for economizing time; for securing and maintaining funds; suggested rules for the observance of discipline; wrote reports; and, afterward, when the committee prepared their own, he revised and amended them as occasion required. In acts so commendable he persevered for years, with minute attention, known only to those who were favoured with his company. In these committee meetings he has frequently remained until a late hour at night, and without asking uneasy questions about fair or foul weather, or denoting the least anxiety respecting personal ease and convenience.

In the management also of our missionary affairs Mr. Benson kindly interested himself. The Wesleyan missions, on his appointment to London in the year 1803, were then comparatively in their infantile state; the funds were scanty and contingent; they had hitherto been raised chiefly by the personal influence and indefatigable exertions of Dr. Coke. The beautiful and well-adapted apparatus of parent and branch societies, subject to the control

of an active and responsible committee, had then no existence. Dr. Coke had departed for America, and left Mr. Benson in charge of the missions generally; and Mr Whitfield, the book-steward, was intrusted with their pecuniary concerns; but, in consequence of the varied and onerous duties of the former, and the serious illness of the latter, the missionary concern was greatly embarrassed. Bills of exchange, drawn for the support of the missionaries in foreign parts, and which required prompt attention, became due, and were presented for payment before it was altogether convenient to meet them. In this emergency it was determined to appoint a committee for the management of mission affairs, till the following conference. This committee consisted of all the travelling preachers in the London circuit, together with those friends who composed the committee for guarding our religious privileges; and also a few others, whose assistance might be useful. Of this committee, which was the first ever formed for conducting the affairs of the Wesleyan missionary operations, Mr. Benson was the president; and the first act of the committee was to lend between three and four hundred pounds, to honour the bills which had been drawn upon Dr. Coke and Mr. Whitfield, on account of the missions. The committee lost no time in idleness. They were wide awake as to the necessity of immediate effort. In order to refund the money which had been borrowed, a circular letter was drawn up, and forwarded to the different circuits throughout the connection, requesting the aid of public collections. The call was responded to, and a reaction was produced; the effect of which was, that a stronger desire was excited to send the gospel to the heathen than had previously existed, and an increase to the missionary funds was the satisfactory result.

And so deeply was Mr. Benson interested in this good cause, that he not only presided at the meetings of the

missionary committee in town, but, when past his seventieth year, he took long journeys into the country, into Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, to preach missionary sermons, and assist at public meetings, for the purpose of aiding the funds of the Missionary Society.

Such was Joseph Benson;—a man who possessed a highly cultivated mind, sterling piety, inflexible integrity, and eminent talents as a Christian minister; and whose labours in the vineyard of our Lord were crowned with almost unexampled success. To him Methodism is deeply indebted for much of its present prosperity. He espoused and defended its doctrines, maintained its discipline, and was an example to believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Nearly seventy years have rolled away since he entered on the itinerant ministry. Methodism was then in its infancy; and was rocked by the winds, and cradled in the storm. Its advocates were comparatively few, and generally poor; and its enemies numerous and wealthy: but he pursued his way through evil report and good report; nothing terrified by his adversaries, sowing beside all waters, and watching for souls as one that must give an account to the Judge of all the earth for the talents with which he was intrusted. But he has long since finished his course, and he finished it with joy: he now rests from his labours, and his works follow him. But though dead, he yet speaketh. He speaks by his holy and self-denying example, especially to his successors in the ministry, to follow him as he followed Christ. And he speaks by his various writings, and particularly by his great work, the Commentary on the Old and New Testaments; a work, replete with sound theological and critical learning, which will at once perpetuate his name, and extend his usefulness, to generations yet unborn. Of this work, the Rev. Thomas Hartwell Horne, in his Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge

of the Holy Scriptures, says, "It is an elaborate and very useful commentary on the sacred Scriptures, which (independently of its practical tendency) possesses the merit of compressing, into a comparatively small compass, the substance of what the piety and learning of former ages have advanced, in order to facilitate the study of the Bible. Its learned author was particularly distinguished for his critical and exact acquaintance with the Greek Testament."

With the following remarks, taken from "The London Christian Instructer," we conclude this volume:—

"Mr. Benson was not only a holy, but an eminent, man. He was not merely what we understand by the commonplace encomium, an excellent preacher; he was a man of genius, in the full and unrestricted import of that comprehensive phrase. As a preacher, he had great faults; but such was the power of his intellect, and such the transcendent energy of his mind and manner, that his defects were altogether forgotten. In fact, his excellences were of that native and uncompromising cast, that could not be otherwise than allied to concomitant failures, though the latter always partook of the masculine mould of his understanding. He sometimes offended by coarseness, but he never even approached the confines of meanness or feebleness. His taste was not remarkable for refinement, but the force and manly simplicity of his mind kept him from touching upon affectation. When he ascended the pulpit, there was but little in his appearance to awaken the admiration of a superficial observer;—there was an apparent languor in his manner, look, and voice, which, combined with the smallness of his figure, contributed to diminish the expectation which would otherwise have been awakened by the intellectual character of his head, and the fine expression of the general outline of his features. But when he had fairly entered into his work,—when he began

to feel his subject,—when the hour of inspiration came upon him,—when he looked forth with intense anxiety on the immortal beings to whom he was commissioned to deliver the message of eternity, he was then all himself. His eye lighted up, his lip quivered, his voice acquired commanding energy; and, varying from elevated to sepulchral tones, allowed no respite to attention. We have never heard a preacher who gave less opportunity for the indulgence of drowsiness. His *forte* did not lie in that finished and sustained style, which, however beautiful and attractive it may sometimes be, has a tendency at length to pall upon the ear. He had little of Cicero, and less of Isocrates, in his composition: his eloquence was Demosthenean; or, if we wished to point out a more specific resemblance, we should say, that it was closely allied, though employed on infinitely nobler subjects, to that of Patrick Henry." The writer adds: "His learning was solid; and, as a theologian, though differing from him in particular points, we have often been delighted and edified by his accuracy and depth."

On a plain tomb of Portland stone, erected to Mr. Benson's memory by his family, in the burying-ground behind the City-road chapel, the following epitaph is inscribed:—

In Memory of the

REV. JOSEPH BENSON,

Who, by the grace of God,
For more than half a century,
Devoted his superior talents,
With indefatigable diligence and apostolic zeal,
To the service of the CHURCH OF CHRIST.

Sound in doctrine,
Scriptural, comprehensive, and practical in his discourses,
Faithful and earnest in his exhortations,
Conscious of the authority of the sacred office,
And ardently desirous of the salvation of souls,
The great HEAD of the CHURCH
Crowned his endeavours with signal success,
In the conversion of sinners,
And in building up believers in their most holy faith.

His numerous publications,
But especially his large and valuable
Commentary upon the Holy Scriptures,
Prove that he was
A man of solid learning, and an eminent divine.

Active, disinterested, and unwearied
In his exertions to promote pure religion,
He desisted not,
Even when the infirmities of nature rapidly advanced,
From his accustomed labours,
Both as a writer and preacher,
Till he was summoned to receive his reward
Through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ,
In whom he died, Feb. 16th, 1821,
Aged 73 years.

Within the communion-rails of the same place of worship, a plain marble tablet, bearing the following inscription, was subsequently erected by order of the conference, as recorded in the Minutes for 1833 :—

Sacred
To the Memory of
JOSEPH BENSON,
Who as a Christian was holy, devoted, and consistent;
Learned, orthodox, and practical, as a commentator;
Zealous, laborious, and faithful, as a pastor.
His public ministrations were marked by
Seriousness, accuracy, and fervour;
And being accompanied by the unction of the Holy One,
For which he continued instant in prayer,
Were eminently acceptable and useful.
By manifestation of the truth commending himself
To every man's conscience in the sight of God,
As the messenger of Christ he persuaded men,
"And much people was added unto the Lord."
Having served his generation by the will of God
He peacefully slept in Jesus February 16th, 1821,
Aged 73 years.

THE END.

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